

COWBOYS, COWBOYS, COWBOYS

OTHER TRIPLE TITLES

Dogs, Dogs, Dogs

Elephants, Elephants, Elephants

Ghosts, Ghosts, Ghosts

Horses, Horses, Horses

Indians, Indians, Indians

Jokes, Jokes, Jokes

Pirates, Pirates, Pirates

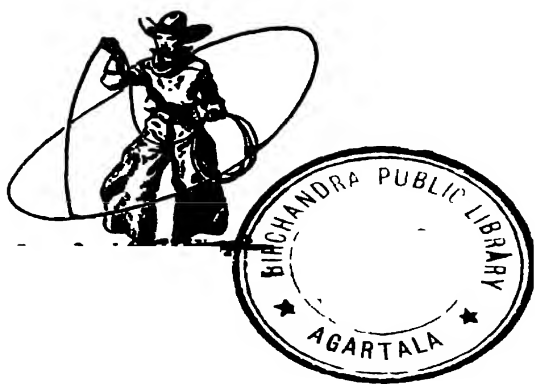
Speed, Speed, Speed

Cowboys Cowboys, Cowboys

Stories of
Round-ups and Rodeos
Branding and Bronco-busting

selected by
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Chatto and Windus
London

Published by
CHATTO AND WINDUS LTD
42 WILLIAM IV STREET
LONDON, W C 2

FIRST PUBLISHED 1913

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
LOWE AND BRYDONE (PRINTERS) LTD.
LONDON, N.W. 10

**To
DAVID
Who gave me enough ideas
for three books**

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HOWDY, STRANGER!



YES, SIR. That fellow over there, "brassbound, copper-riveted throughout, with iron backbones and tail screwed on" is a "genuine bronc-stompin' cowboy."* A colorful fellow, don't you think, with his ten-gallon hat, his gay shirt and bandana, his leather chaps and high-heeled shoes with the silver spurs? Look at the saddle he is carrying—silver trimmed. He is saddling and bridling his pony, "the finest little cowhorse the State has ever seen," he'll tell you. Listen:

"Look here, you dodgasted, pale pink, wall-eyed, glandered, spavined cayuse, pull down that injur-rubber neck of yourn, or I'll skin you alive, and mash in your sides. Hold still, pony, and I'll fix that ear. Is that comfortable? Now, Pete, here comes the saddle. Whoa, pony. Stop twitching your fool back. Now, Pete, the front cinch's fixed. All we've got left is the hind one. Pete, you dog-goned inflated lost soul, let out that wind and do it quick, or I'll bust you wide open. Quit that, Pete, quit it, I say. Good old Pete, you sure are some horse." **

* From *Rodeo* by Glen Rounds. Holiday House.

** From *The Cowboy* by Philip Ashton Rollins. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Cowboys, Cowboys, Cowboys

And that is the way all cowboys always talk to their favorite ponies. Colorful, what?

But colorful or not, this cowboy, cowpuncher, puncher, buckaroo, rider, bronco-peeler, bronco-twister, bronco-buster, whatever you want to call him (and they'd all be right), is a hard-working guy. His is often a dull, monotonous life trailing cattle through long, hot, dusty days and herding them through dreary, lonely hours on the prairie at night. He has courage to face all kinds of dangers, from stampedes to forest fires. He is cheerful. A complaining cowboy isn't popular. He is a quiet, reserved sort of fellow, not telling you too much about himself until he knows you. But he has fun, too, for he likes his life.

In these stories you will experience some of the things cowboys go through: stampedes, roundups, rodeos, horse drives, branding, riding bucking broncos, and catching wild horses. You'll see what a real fellow the cowboy is.

Adios!

P. F.

THE CLIFF DANCE

By STEPHEN HOLT



LOREN DOANE anxiously skirted the herd, watched the night storm blowing up and wondered why he should be worrying about Packard's two hundred beef steers lying bedded before him.

Maybe Tom Small, his cowboy companion, had the right of it when he suggested: "Let 'em run if they want to. Old Packard's whipped off to Calgary in his car—these critters don't seem to mean much to him."

As Loren shunted a wandering steer back into the bunch, he figured he'd adopt Tom's attitude. Anyway, he'd be eighteen in a month and could sign up with the Navy. That would be better than working for mighty slim wages, plus a room down off the oat bin. Hot in summer, cold in winter, and old man Packard riding him continuously to get a move on. But he caught his breath as a big red steer got to its feet, rump first, and went ploughing through the herd rousing others.



Cowboys, Cowboys, Cowboys

"Easy there, boy! Easy, 'Red'!" he crooned. He'd saved Red from a blizzard, three years before—brought him in across his saddle horn. And all old Packard had done was grunt.

"Nobody'd blame us," Tom persisted, following Loren. "When that storm hits and these babies start to roll, it'd be suicide to try to head 'em!"

Loren thought so too. The prairie was full of badger holes, and in the dark. . . . "Yeah," he said, but automatically he reached down and eased the cinch on his sorrel. A horse could run better with full wind.

"It was old man Packard's fault we didn't load today. The cars were there on the sidetrack, but we didn't have loading orders." Tom's tone grew bitter.

True, Mr. Packard hadn't come back. The two boys had close-herded the beef near the siding till sunset, then had to get them out to graze, because their weight mustn't be allowed to shrink. If only Mr. Packard had returned, they'd have been rolling toward Winnipeg by now.

"Tom," Loren said, "Mr. Packard's probably been delayed by something he couldn't help." He started around the herd again. "Now, let's keep these ornery cusses bunched, see?"

Shoving his mount ahead till he felt the give of the cattle against him, Loren urged Tom to press his horse closer also. Packard's cattle, animals that meant more money for Packard, the man who seemed to begrudge him his forty-a-month wages!



The Cliff Dance

"Easy, there," he sang out, soothingly against the rising wind and the continual glare of lightning. But now the steers really started to move. A coyote howled lonesomely from the hills. Another answered from the direction of the riverbank—that high piecrust edge only a mile away, with the storm blowing straight for it.

Red bellowed, lashing out with his wicked hoofs at an imaginary danger in the rustling brown grass.

"Oh—oh," cried Tom sharply. "What'd I tell you? Let's get ready to dodge."

Loren felt the same impulse, heightened by an inner resentment toward Packard for stacking him up against this dangerous situation. Yet he put spurs sharply to the sorrel and swung his arm for Tom to follow.

"Mill 'em, Tom!" he ordered. "In a circle! We've got to try."

Rain began pelting down, and off to the left Red started a short jumping run. Loren made for him, riding steadily, avoiding any sign of haste, and eased him back into the herd.

With a sigh of relief, the cowboy brushed his hand across his wet face. He rode tirelessly on, with Tom dogging his heels, backing him up in a constant struggle to keep the restless beef from stampeding.

Then a flash of blinding lightning and a loud crack of thunder brought another bellow from Red. He kicked out and ran crazily at right angles to the herd. Five others followed closely at his heels.

Cowboys, Cowboys, Cowboys

As Loren took out after them, a second bolt startled his horse and he stumbled to his knees.

"You hit?" Tom inquired anxiously.

Loren practically lifted his horse by the bit. "No!" he yelled. "Head Red. Head him!"

But it was too late. Already Red had the cattle moving straight for the yawning riverbank.

Loren knew it would be showing good sense to slack off and let them run. Nobody would blame him. On such a pitch-dark night, with the rain slanting across the prairie in a solid sheet, one misstep and his horse would carry him down under hundreds of slicing hoofs. Nevertheless, he swung his sorrel right against the herd.

"Skip it," Tom urged, riding alongside. "We'll head 'em yet!" Loren gritted. He gave his mount the spurs and rode down wind, pressing closer, closer, until he could see Red in the lead.

"Not a chance!" Tom slackened off.

Loren fought on alone, struggling not only with the frightened beasts, but also with a sense of being slightly daft in risking his life to save property that the owner wasn't too careful about saving for himself. But something within him wouldn't let him quit. Digging in his spurs, he drove his horse along the herd. Precious minutes passed before he caught up with Red and lashed him across his panic-blinded eyes, yelling, "Swerve, Red, swerve!"

Red only shook his head and bore on, with Loren and his tiring steed matching him stride for stride.



The Cliff Dance

As the roar of hoofs changed to a deep rumble, Loren heard from somewhere far away, Tom's yell—"Get out! Get away!"

But he set himself to make one last try to check the herd from going over the steep bank just ahead.

Spurring his jaded horse, he swung alongside the racing animals and, flailing with the butt end of his rain-stiffened lariat, tried to turn them.

Once more he made it to Red and caught him across the face again and again as the yawning chasm loomed close. Cold fear rode with him as he plunged toward the cliff, rope swinging, yelling, yelling, seemingly in vain! Suddenly his pony was dancing on the very brink, while below the river torrent roared and dashed madly over jagged rocks.

Red *must* turn now. He had to turn, or else the whole stampeding herd would fall headlong into the river, carrying Loren and his mount with them to destruction. Loren found himself tense and breathless, in an agony of apprehension. A few yards more and—but at last the big steer sensed the danger. With a deep throaty "Ba-aaww!" Red flung his fifteen hundred pounds of beef to the right and led the bunch up along the riverbank to safety!

When daylight came, the cattle were grazing quietly, well away from the river. Presently, from the direction of the railroad, an automobile approached, driven by a ruddy-faced man with a bullet-like head covered by thick white hair. A hundred yards from Tom and Loren, he stopped and honked his horn.

Cowboys, Cowboys, Cowboys

"Probably he'll bawl you out for running fat off 'em in the dark," Tom muttered.

Loren was already on his way over to Mr. Packard. He was the boss—and when he honked, the hired man got moving.

"Howdy, Mr. Packard!" As he dismounted from his sweaty, mud-caked sorrel, Loren still had that queer feeling that it wasn't quite bright to have taken such a chance the night before. Not sensible like Tom.

"So, you had a stampede last night," Packard stated quietly. He knew cattle, could tell what they'd been through. "Straight toward the cliffs, too. But you stuck with 'em, and turned 'em without a yard to spare!"

"Yes, sir!" Loren was glad that Mr. Packard understood what a close shave he'd had.

"When you could have stepped aside and let them go over?"

Loren flushed, shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "Yes, sir," he said again.

Suddenly, the rancher got out of the car and laid strong muscular hands on Loren's soggy shoulders.

"Nice work, partner!" he exclaimed.

"Partner?" Loren's head spun.

"Yes," nodded Mr. Packard, "junior partner—because you've got something inside you, Loren, that won't let you quit, no matter what the odds. That's the kind of feller I want to take over here on the Bar 2 when I get old."

He laughed, a booming laugh, and with two bounds





"You turned 'em without a yard to spare!"

Cowboys, Cowboys, Cowboys

hit the front seat of his car. "It's okay to start loading the steers," he called, and in ten seconds was down the trail, his white head erect.

Loren climbed on his horse in a happy daze. "Partner!" he whispered. "Living in the big ranch house! Giving the orders; talking to Mr. Packard man to man!" Gently he touched his sorrel with the spurs and rode over to the cattle and Tom, who somehow didn't seem so smart and sensible after all!

2

WHITEY'S FIRST ROUND-UP

By GLEN ROUNDS



NOW WHITEY was ten years old, or thereabouts. He had a hand-me-down Stetson hat with a rattlesnake-skin hatband and a pair of fancy stitched high-heeled boots, but even with all these trappings he wasn't any great shakes for size.

Nevertheless, he'd been living with Uncle Torwal on the ranch for several years now, and considered himself practically a full-fledged cowboy. He'd even practiced until he could walk almost as bowlegged as any cowboy in the outfit!

"Reckon you'll be wanting me to go along when you start out on the round-up tomorrow, won't you, Uncle Torwal?" he said one day.

"What makes you reckon such a thing as that?" Uncle Torwal wanted to know.

"Well," said Whitey, "I'm just about a top hand, I figure."

"Well, you'd better think again, then," Uncle Torwal grinned. "Chances are the first day out you'd get

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us into some kind of a jackpot that'd take a week to untangle."

"Naw, I wouldn't, Uncle Torwal!" said Whitey. "Honest, I'd be mighty careful to mind just what you told me so I woulun't be any trouble at all!"

Uncle Torwal thought it over for a while. "Well, I reckon you've got to start some time," he said doubtfully. "Get your bed-roll ready to go. But mind, the first bobble you make I'm a-going to send you back!"

"I won't make any bobble," Whitey promised him and tore off to find a tarp' to roll his bed in.

Long before sunup next morning everyone on the ranch was up and stirring. The cowboys rolled their round-up beds and threw them on the cook wagon after breakfast and went on to the corrals to catch up their horses.

Whitey was walking importantly over to throw his on with the others when Uncle Torwal stopped him. "What have you got in there?" he wanted to know.

"Just my bed," Whitey told him.

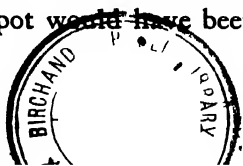
"Looks mighty big to me," Uncle Torwal grunted. "Unroll it and let me look at it."

Whitey untied the rope and unrolled it on the ground.

"Listen, old-timer, four soogans is enough for any cowhand. Take out the rest and leave them."

"Yessir!" Whitey said, and did as he was told. After he'd gotten that taken care of, he hurried around to the calf pasture to catch up old Spot.

Any other morning Spot would have been waiting



Whitey's First Round-up

at the pasture gate, ready for the bridle, but this morning he had other ideas. He skittered around and snorted and refused to be caught. Whitey got madder and madder. If he didn't hurry, everybody would be gone ahead of him, and here it was his first day on the round-up.

Finally, he went back to the stable to see if maybe Uncle Torwal would help him.

"Please, Uncle Torwal," he said, "will you help me catch ol' Spot? He's spooky as all get out this morning, and won't let me get within a rod of him."

"You don't say so!" Uncle Torwal said. "It sure is too bad, but I never have yet kept a cowpuncher around that couldn't catch up his own horse. Never seemed just worth while, somehow."

"Yessir, I guess that's right," said Whitey.

Uncle Torwal went on saddling up his horse. When he had finished he turned to Whitey again. "Get a pan of oats," he said, "and toll him up with that. If the other fellers are gone when you're ready, come on over to the old stage crossing on Hay Crick. That's where the first camp will be. It's less than ten miles and you know where the old road goes. But don't go taking any short cuts, now. You follow 'round by the road."

"Yessir," Whitey told him, and went for a pan of oats.

He held his rope behind him and shook the oat pan and Spot came trotting up. But he still wasn't ready to be caught. He'd monkey around until he could reach



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out and get a mouthful of oats, then he'd whirl and gallop off to the other side of the pasture to eat them.

Whitey saw the riders go out to start their day's circle. Later, Wacapominy, the round-up cook, climbed up on the high spring seat of the chuck wagon and hollered at his four-horse team and drove off. The horse wrangler with the bunch of extra saddle horses that cowboys call the *remuda* followed along behind. And, still, Whitey hadn't caught his horse. It wasn't until he was mad enough to have cat fits, and everybody else was long gone, that Spot got tired of the game and let himself be caught. Whitey saddled up and pulled the cinch extra tight just for spite, and started out alone.

Once actually on the way to the round-up, however, Whitey felt better and started thinking that there was really no reason why he should go around by the road, when by cutting straight over the hills he'd see much more interesting country. And besides, he was practically a cowboy, wasn't he? And cowboys didn't go around by the roads when they wanted to go places. So he started across country.

After he'd ridden a few miles he came on an old buffalo wallow. Quite often there are old Indian arrowheads to be found in such places, so he got off to take a look. A few minutes' searching convinced him there were none here, so he decided he'd better be on his way. But when he looked around for Spot, Spot was gone!

Whitey had been riding with his bridle reins tied



Whitey's First Round up

together, and when he got off he'd forgotten to throw them over Spot's head and drop them on the ground. Now, a Western horse is trained to stand and wait if the reins are dropped on the ground, but if they are left over his neck, he'll go away and leave you afoot.

Here was a pickle, for sure. Spot would go back to the ranch, Whitey knew, so there was nothing for him to do but walk back, too. So he hitched up his belt and started walking. From the top of the next rise he saw Spot just going out of sight over the next ridge, already a mile away.

After that Whitey was alone in the middle of the prairie. He stomped along, madder than a hornet, and tried to remember some of the terrible things he'd heard Wacapomny mutter to his horses. Here it was his first day on the round-up and already he'd let himself be set afoot like any greenhorn.

And then his feet started to hurt. His high-heeled boots were fine for riding, but they were never made to walk in. Before he'd gone a mile he found he had blisters on both of his heels. And it was still a long way home.

And as if that wasn't trouble enough, when Whitey limped up over a little knoll he came face to face with a bunch of range cattle. So now, besides being mad and footsore, he was scared. For he knew that wild cattle won't bother a man on a horse, but he didn't know what they'd do to one that was on foot.

There were no trees for him to climb, nor any fences to get behind, so he stood still and wondered



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what in the world he should do.

The cattle threw up their heads when they saw him, and started edging toward him. He didn't dare run, and when he tried to yell at them he found that for some reason he couldn't make a sound. They came up and stood in a circle watching him, and he watched them. Now and again, one of the critters would give a low bellow and paw dirt in the air. Whitey would gladly have given his Stetson hat, with the rattlesnake-skin hatband, and his fancy stitched boots to have been some place else.

Just when he'd about given up hope of ever getting home again, he saw Uncle Torwal riding his way leading Spot. Uncle Torwal hollered and waved his hat and the cattle moved off. "Find the walking kind of crowded?" Uncle Torwal asked, grinning.

"Yes, just a mite," Whitey said, hoping he didn't look as scared as he felt.

"If you'd just hollered and waved your hat those critters would have gone on away. But standing still the way you were doing made them curious."

"They looked mean," Whitey said as he climbed into the saddle.

Uncle Torwal didn't say any more and they rode on toward camp, but Whitey knew he was in disgrace, and he didn't know that there was much he could do about it. Acting like a greenhorn twice on the day of his first round-up was pretty bad.

When they came in sight of the chuck wagon there was already a big herd of cattle gathered on the flat off



Whitey's First Round-up

a little way, and the cowboys were eating their dinner, squatted on the ground around Wacapominy's Dutch ovens.

When they'd eaten, Whitey expected to be sent back, but instead Uncle Torwal set him to dragging up wood for the cook fire and the branding fire. There were cottonwood trees near-by where he gathered dry limbs and dragged them up on the end of a rope from his saddle horn.

When he had gathered enough for both fires he sat on his horse and watched the branding. A cowboy would ride into the herd and after some maneuvering around would flip his noose around a calf's legs and drag him out to the branding fire with the mother following anxiously behind.

"Quarter Circle Z!" the cowboy would sing out, or "Hashknife" or "Turkey Track," depending on what brand the old cow wore, and while Uncle Torwal took the proper branding iron out of the fire, Birdlegs Smith and another cowboy grabbed the calf and stretched it on the ground. Uncle Torwal would slap the hot iron on the calf's side, the calf would bellow, more surprised than hurt, and a few minutes later he'd be up and tearing across the flat, plumb indignant at having his owner's mark put on him this way.

Whitey was sitting there swinging the loop in his rope, wishing they'd put him on a real job, when Uncle Torwal slapped the iron onto a black calf that let out a bellow you could hear half a mile. At this his mother burst out of the herd with her head down

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and her tail straight up. It was plain to see that she was intending to clean up the men on the ground around the fire.

Now a bull shuts his eyes and charges blind, so it's not hard to dodge him. But an old cow doesn't make that mistake. So Uncle Torwal and the men were scrambling to get out of there quick. Except for Whitey, there didn't happen to be anyone on a horse near enough to stop her.

To get to the fire she had to pass Whitey and Spot. When Whitey looked back and saw her, he swung his loop at her to head her off and accidentally caught her head in the noose. Spot was about half asleep, but when the rope went past his head he remembered his cowhorse days and braced himself. The cow hit the end of the rope with a crash and turned head over heels, landing on her side almost in the branding fire. By the time she gathered her wits, more men had ridden up to drive her off.

Naturally, the cowboys admired Whitey's quick work with his rope, and he didn't tell them it was an accident. After the excitement died down Uncle Torwal said to him, "Reckon that makes us even now, cowboy. If you haven't anything else to do you can tend the brandin' fire and keep talley for me."

"Yessir!" said Whitey. "That'd suit me just fine!"

3

COWPONY'S PRIZE

By L. R. DAVIS



SPIKE WAS a very small cowpony with a velvety nose and long ears. He had been sent East as a birthday present for Patsy Cameron because he was no longer needed on his uncle's ranch. Patsy fell in love with him the very first moment she saw him. He was so small, and sturdy, and dependable that you just couldn't help loving him.

"Let me try him," she pleaded with her brother who had ridden him home from the station.

"Go as far as you like," said Jack condescendingly. Jack had been hunting for the past two years and, as a member of the Middletown Hunt, he looked down on cowponies. "He's not very exciting."

But Patsy was so busy trotting Spike up and down the drive that she never heard. "He's perfect," she beamed as she rode back. "He's nicer than any horse I've ever ridden."

"Oh, well," said Jack. "Everybody thinks the first horse they own is perfect."

Cowboys, Cowboys, Cowboys

“But he *is* perfect ” said Patsy. “You just wait until the horseshow. Then you’ll see.”

Jack laughed good naturedly. “You’ll have to work some if you want to turn him into a show horse. And even if you do train him perfectly, somebody might mistake him for a donkey. Just look at his ears!”

Patsy said nothing but stroked Spike’s soft grey nose. “Don’t listen,” she whispered, riding him toward the stable.

Jack’s hunter, Tipperary, looked up and snorted as she led Spike into his new home. “Just you keep quiet, Tip,” she said slipping a halter over Spike’s wise old head. “Just because you have a few horseshow ribbons hung over your stall doesn’t mean that you’re the only person in the stable. Spike may have something to show for himself, too, one of these days.”

But Jack’s advice was good Patsy knew, and the very next day she began to train Spike to be a show horse. It wasn’t that his manners weren’t very good already but they were more suited to the ranch than the showing. Cantering from a walk, for instance, had been quite left out of his education. And then he was too anxious to start off the minute you got on his back, and he had never been taught to side step or to back.

“Now,” Patsy would say as he walked calmly along, his ears flapping. “Now, canter.” But generally Spike would trot instead, and not break into his loping canter until he felt like it. Then Patsy would pull him up and comfort herself with the thought that



Cowpony's Prize

the horseshow was a long way off. Each day she finished off the performance by making Spike ride herd on the two cows and the old farm horse that had to be brought in from the south pasture.

"What's the idea?" asked Jack when he saw Patsy and Spike at work. "They won't make you do that in a horseshow!"

"No," said Patsy, "but I don't want him to forget the things he was really meant for."

But the summer went all too quickly and soon it was the last day of the Middletown Horseshow and Patsy was riding Spike in the class for Useful Road Hacks. Jack said that this was the class in which performance counted more and appearance least.

"If only he behaves perfectly, maybe they won't notice his looks," Patsy thought, as Spike and eleven other horses trotted briskly around the judges' stand.

"Walk, please," came the order from the middle of the ring.

Patsy pulled Spike down to a walk. "Now, it's coming," she thought. "Now, it's coming! Oh! Please, Spike, be a good boy and canter nicely."

"Canter, please!" came the command.

Gently Patsy guided Spike to a corner of the ring, pulled slightly on the left rein, and urged him forward with her right root. In another moment he was breaking into a nice, even canter.

Patsy breathed a sigh of relief. "Good boy," she murmured. "Good boy."

Cowboys, Cowboys, Cowboys

The months of training were being rewarded. Spike was behaving perfectly!

Soon the judges ordered all the horses into the middle of the ring. Patsy held her head high with pride as Spike stood stock still the way she had taught him. But the judges didn't seem to be so impressed and when they called out the numbers of the four prize winners, Spike was not among them.

"Never you mind," she whispered to Spike consolingly as they followed the other losers out of the ring. "You did the best you could and I think you were splendid." But as she and Spike came slowly out of the ring, she was rather glad that Jack was watching the hunter trials in another part of the grounds.

"I'm sorry we didn't win something," she whispered as she sponged him down. "Just so that you could have a ribbon to show Tipperary." Spike nuzzled her pocket for sugar. "Go along," she laughed. "You act as though you didn't care."

When she had made Spike comfortable, Patsy went out to see the rest of the horseshow. It was all exciting, even seeing the horses being walked up and down before going into the ring. There were brown horses and grey horses; chestnuts and bays. Hunters being limbered up for the jumping classes and ponies led on leading straps. Everywhere horses were walking and trotting, whinnying and shying, and showing off their manners to admiring onlookers. It seemed to Patsy as



Cowpony's Prize

though every horse in the world must be at the Mid-^letown Horseshow.

She watched Cecily Prentice's mare, Holiday, trot mincingly past, her small head held high in the air. "She is beautiful," Patsy thought, admiringly. "But I don't believe she's as useful as Spike."

"Hello, Cecily," she called. "Congratulations on winning the road hack class."

"Well, there wasn't much competition," the other girl laughed. "You don't really think that cowpony of yours is a show-horse now, do you?"

"No, I don't think he's a show-horse," Patsy said, "but I do think he's a useful road hack"—"besides being the sweetest pet in the whole world," she added to herself.

"Say, Patsy!" Cecily was trotting towards her again. "I've got an extra space in the van that's taking my horses home. Don't you want to send Spike along? He won't be any trouble at all and we can drop him on the way?"

"No, thanks," Patsy was polite but firm. "He might get kicked."

"Oh, don't be silly, I'm sending all three of my horses. Claude'll be right on the van to take care of them."

It was a long way home but Patsy never hesitated. "No, thanks," she said. "I think I'll ride Spike home. He's used to long rides. And besides," she added, grinning, "out in Wyoming where he comes from they don't cart useful horses around in vans."



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An hour or so later Patsy was riding Spike home along a deserted country road. "I'm glad I didn't let you go in Cecily's van," she decided, patting the pony's wet sides. "It was nice of her but Jack says horses often get hurt that way and besides a van's no place for a respectable cowpony."

It was hot riding and the lonely road seemed endless. Spike was tired and his long ears hung forward sadly. "We won't be home until late," Patsy realized. "I wish I'd waited and brought you home tomorrow with Jack." She patted the pony's neck and then held on with both hands as he pulled abruptly into the gutter to let a large truck roar by. "Good boy," she applauded, rubbing the dust out of her eyes. "Any other horse in the world would have shied with a great thing like that going by. That must be Cecily's van. I guess they came this way to miss the traffic."

It was growing darker now. There was a crackling noise in the woods that made Patsy jump. Nervously she remembered the story of the tiger that had once escaped from the county zoo. Suppose there were some such hidden danger behind those shadows? The noise continued. "Come on, boy," Patsy murmured, urging Spike into a trot. "This road is too lonely for fun."

They went through a dark stretch of wood and then, at the top of a long hill, Patsy pulled Spike down to a walk. "Easy, boy," she said, "you walk down to the bridge. We've still got a long way before we get home."

Through the dusk, she looked toward the tiny



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wooden bridge that led over the brook at the bottom of the hill. "They ought to build a new bridge over that creek," she thought. "This one's so old the wood's all rotten." She looked forward as Spike made his way slowly down the hill. "Whew," he whistled as the bridge came into view. "Something's happened. A trick's gone right through the planking."

Sure enough, at the bottom of the hill, a large red van was half in and half out of the water. A Negro groom was trying to quiet two excited horses that were tied to a near-by tree.

"Claude," she called, suddenly recognizing him. "Claude, are you hurt? Whatever happened?"

"De truck done busted through de bridge, Miss Patsy," the man winced with pain as he spoke. "And I was battered up somethin' awful and Dixie Boy here strained his shoulder and de Vixen scraped both her knees. But Holiday she done run away. Oh, Miss Patsy, she done be quite gone!"

"Gone where?" Patsy asked.

"Gone off straight into de woods," Claude panted. "She broke away crazylike when Jake tried to get her off de truck. I couldn't help him none, honest, Miss Patsy, I couldn't."

"No," said Patsy. "I shouldn't think you could. That arm looks pretty well smashed up."

"Jake was driving de van and he didn't get hurt'd. So he go for help. He done tied Vixen and Dixie Boy but Holiday go crazy. She awful stupid on de road, Miss Patsy," the man half sobbed, "and in de woods

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and de dark she sure fo get hurted. She's sure fiah goin' to break her laig."

"Stop crying," Patsy ordered. "And don't try to walk around. You'll only make yourself worse. Spike and I'll have Holiday back by the time Jack gets here with help. Which way did she go?"

"That-a-way, Miss," the boy blubbered. "Oh, lordy, lordy, what'll ever happen if Holiday gets lost. She ain't used to nothin' but de practise ring. Miss Cecily don't nevah take her cross country."

"Useful hack," Patsy sniffed, heading Spike into the woods. "Useful for what? Why, if she can't stand up on a rough trail and she's scared besides, she's sure to hurt herself." Spike broke into his steady canter. "Good boy," she encouraged him. "We've got to find her."

They soon came to a little clearing and Patsy stopped to get her bearings. "Holiday must have turned right here and gone further into the woods or else she went left down to the river," Patsy mused. "Maybe she was what made that crackling noise at the top of the hill. Spike, I guess we'd better go up hill as fast as we can. If it gets really dark, we'll never catch her."

The little roan made his way along the rough trail as though it were broad daylight. Patsy's back ached but she was too excited to care. Branches cut her face but she hardly knew it. "If you only don't stumble, Spike," she whispered to the tired pony, "I just know we'll get her."





"What'll ever happen if Holiday gets lost?"

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In another five minutes Patsy heard a crackling of branches and a frightened whinny. There in the road ahead of her was a black figure. Patsy could hear the quick breath and the pawing foot. "Holiday hasn't hurt herself yet," she thought, "but we mustn't frighten her by coming up too suddenly." Quickly she dismounted.

"Stand still, Spike," she ordered. "I'm going to walk up to her on foot. Easy, pet, steady, girl," she crooned, approaching the excited horse.

In another minute she held the broken bit of rope that hung on to Holiday's halter and was leading her back to Spike. "Now," she thought, "if Spike'll stand still while I get on we'll be all right." She mounted and, for the second time that day, was glad of all the afternoons she had trained Spike in the field at home. Even with an excited horse whinnying and balking at his side, Spike stood like a small statue.

At last they were back on the road leading to the bridge. "If a car comes by and Holiday gets scared we're lost," Patsy thought. "If she tries to run, I'll never be able to hold onto this rope." Carefully Spike picked his way along the road, the frightened horse shying and stumbling at his side.

As they drew near to the bridge, Patsy saw from the number of headlights that help had come. But how was she ever to get Holiday up to that frightening array of cars? Holiday plunged and the rope tore through Patsy's blistered hands. "She's gone," Patsy



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thought and then nearly tumbled off as Spike with a cat-like turn jumped to the startled animal's far side. Spike, his long ears laid back, was turning and twisting like one possessed. It was all Patsy could do to keep astride of him.

"Why, he's riding herd," she suddenly realized, as the little cowpony urged the larger horse a few paces nearer the lights. "Why, he's herding Holiday right up to the van."

Scared by the noise and confusion, Holiday balked suddenly but Spike was ready for her and with bared teeth urged her forward. "Hey, Claude," Patsy called still clinging to the saddle. "Get somebody to hold this horse. Spike can't keep her here forever."

In another minute someone was holding onto Holiday's halter and Patsy had her arms around Spike's neck telling him what a good horse he was.

The next morning, as Patsy came slowly down the stairs, she could hear her father and Jack in the dining room talking about the horseshow. Jack was going over every detail of Tipperary's triumph in the Hunter class. Patsy hated the thought of going in. Jack would be so patronizing about Spike.

But the moment she was in the room she caught sight of a package by her plate. She opened it with trembling fingers. Mail was always exciting.

"She had it hands down," Jack was saying.

"Look," interrupted Patsy, as she took off the final paper and pulled a fluttering blue rosette out of the



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parcel. A card dropped to the table and, as Patsy stood speechless looking at the ribbon, Jack read it out loud.

"Dear Patsy," it ran, "Since Spike proved himself so much the more useful horse last night it seems only fair that he should share Holiday's honors. So she is sending him the ribbon which she won in the Useful Road Hack Class with thanks for his wonderful help. Gratefully, Cecily Prentice."

"It's Spike's very own ribbon," said Patsy, when she could say anything at all. "And he'll have it hanging right over his stall so that Tipperary'll never laugh at him again."

4

THE MAIL STARTS

By CHARLES L. SKELTON



EAGER CROWDS filled the streets, the eating houses, and the trading places of St. Joseph on April 3, 1860. Something in the air that day stirred faintly even the dullest; those sensitive and alert thrilled with high emotion. The continent, still unsubdued, scarcely explored, was that day being made smaller. The vast, silent prairies, over which still lingered the desert legend, the mysterious intermountain land of the Mormons, the golden Western coast—all were that day being bound closer together. The flying hoofs of the best horses and the nerve of the best riders in all the West were to work the miracle. The Pony Express—audacious American exploit—ten days from the Missouri River to the Golden Gate!

Jeff, thrilling to the excitement, stuck to his job on the dray line, bending his back to heavy loads all day. A poor job, and one that he knew would last no longer than that week. But he stuck till at last quitting time



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came. Then he hurried to the Express Company's stable, south of Patee Park, fearing he would be too late, expecting every moment to hear the signal announcing that the Pony Express had started.

A crowd was mixing aimlessly in the street in front of the stable. The stable doors were shut. Jeff pressed through the throng and pounded on the doors. "Alex!" he called. "Let me in, will you?"

A door opened slightly, he squeezed through, then the door was barred again.

"What's the matter, Alex?" he demanded. "Haven't they started yet? It's way after five o'clock."

"The train's late! Don't know how much. They can't go till it gets in, it's bringing Eastern mail for the Express."

"Who's going to ride? You?"

"We drew straws for it—Billy Richardson won." Alex fought down a cough. "Come on back and see the layout. He's going to ride that brown mare that took your eye the other day."

Back in a box stall, knee-deep in straw, several lithe, bronzed lads were grouped around a slim, high-spirited brown mare. They wore the fancy red shirts, blue trousers, and high boots of Pony Express riders.

The brown mare whinnied impatiently as the hostlers, feeding the other horses along the manger rows, passed her by; the red-shirted riders waited tensely. For the twentieth time, Billy Richardson examined and adjusted the creaking new Express saddle. Seven



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o'clock now, soft April dusk creeping into the stalls, faintly heard notes coming from Rosenblatt's Brass Band, playing to the crowds uptown.

"You're all dressed up, Billy," Alex chaffed.

Richardson grinned. "Yes, but you know how it is, if the crowd doesn't." He fingered the silver bugle at his belt. "This bugle, and these fancy chaps—" he shook his wolfskin chaps impatiently, "are all for show. I'll leave 'em on the ferryboat as I go over. Just about as well leave 'em here, be so dark pretty quick nobody uptown'll see 'em anyhow." He straightened his slim, muscular figure. "This," he patted the Colt revolver in his holster, "goes with me. But there's precious little chance for danger on this first lap. The country across the river is getting pretty well settled up for the first fifty miles. The fun with the Indians will all be further west. I wish—"

"Listen!" Alex interrupted.

Faint, but clear, a whistle sounded. The special train was coming at last!

Richardson sprang into the saddle. The incoming mail had yet to be rushed from the train to the Express office, wrapped in oiled silk to keep out moisture, and locked in the mochila before the starting signal would sound, but he was not going to have any of the delay charged to him. The brown mare pressed up to the closed stable doors and thrust nervously at the bit.

The whistle sounded again, loudly. Then silence, more waiting, while the slow dusk thickened.

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Boom! The jarring report of a cannon, blocks away, gave the signal. Impatient hands flung the stable doors wide open. Shouts warned the crowd outside: "Get back!" "Look out!" "Here he comes!"

With a farewell wave of his hand for those in the stable, Richardson dashed out. Around a corner and down a street he sped to the Express office. There he swung out of the saddle while the mochila with its padlocked cantinas was fitted into place. Then he leaped again to his seat and galloped through gathering darkness, along streets filled with waving, yelling men, to the foot of Jule Street, and clattered up the gangplank of the waiting ferryboat *Denver*.

Jeff, watching from the stable door, lost sight of him as he rounded the corner. Jeff stood there a little time listening to the rising and falling cheers that marked the rider's swift flight to the ferry. He looked about, then, for Alex Carlyle. But Alex had gone, as had the other Pony Express riders. The crowd had melted away. From inside the stable came the muted sounds of evening—the rattle of halters, the stamp of hoofs, a low, steady munching along the rows of feed boxes. Loneliness pressed upon Jeff. He thought of Chet, with pride, yet with a stabbing thrust of longing, gone now a week to his station on the Pony Express line far out on the high plains, somewhere west of Julesburg.

Hard to bear, this separation. Hard likewise for Jeff was the knowledge that though the first Pony Express was now speeding gloriously into the night



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and the West, he himself had no part in it. Yet his shoulders were squared, his head was up, his lips were a thin, straight line as he turned and walked slowly down the dark, silent street.

"Mister, what's the chance for a job?"

The tall, hatchet-faced proprietor of the livery and sale stable looked Jeff up and down before he spoke.

"Know anything about horses?"

"Yes, sir, I've worked with them quite a lot."

"Have, eh? Do you reckon you could ride a pony down to the water trough for me?"

"Sure. Where's the pony?"

"Back here in the corral." The man, with a wink and a motion of the head which escaped Jeff, led the way through the long, low stable. Jeff followed close. A couple of men who had been squatting on their heels in front of the stable got up and walked after them.

Inside the pole corral a mud-caked calico mustang stood tied to a post.

The man hauled a stock saddle and a bridle out of a feed trough. The ewe-necked mustang stood with drooping head and drawn-back ears while he slipped the bridle on, settled the saddle in place, and drew up the latigos.

Jeff turned and laid his small bundle of clothing in the feed trough. As he did, he met the glance of one of the two men perched on the top rail of the corral, and fancied he caught, in an almost imper-



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ceptible motion of the fellow's head, a signal of warning.

He stepped closer to the jug-headed mustang. He saw it had a wicked eye on him; he sensed something vicious beneath the brute's docile stand.

"Ready?" asked the man.

"Yep."

He went up with a quick, light swing. His right foot caught its stirrup at the first thrust.

The mustang's head jerked down as Jeff hit the saddle, its withers came up, its back humped till the saddle crawled. Straight up in the air it went, coming down stiff-legged. It hit the gravel like a ton of brick. It shot across the corral in twisting, hard-hitting jumps, muscles bunched like steel coils. The saddle strings snapped like whiplashes.

Jeff was there. He was part of the saddle. His left hand gripped the reins, his right swung his hat in wide circles. "E-yah! Whoopee!" he yelled.

The mustang threw itself on its side. Jeff slipped free of the saddle as the mud-caked brute went down, crouched beside it as it lay for an instant kicking, and swung into the saddle as it jumped to its feet. It plunged for the corral wall to scrape him off, but he twitched its head around and swung it into the clear.

Now the mustang lunged, leaped crookedly, with arched back and closely gathered feet. Gravel sprayed the corral walls. Jeff was dizzy. Sky, earth, and corral were one blur to him. He stuck.

One more frantic burst of bucking, then the mus-



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tang straightened out into easy crowhops. It swung to the rein; Jeff brought it around and rode it up to the corral gate, where it stood, trembling, foam-covered. "Nice pony you've got, mister," he grinned to the tall man perched on the top rail of the corral. "Where'd you say that water trough is?"

"Boy, you're a rider!" The man dropped to the ground inside the corral. "I 'lowed you'd last just about two jumps. The joke is on me. So you're looking for a job? Say, if I had anything at all I could give you to do, I'd take you on, but I hain't got a thing, right now."

He was loosening the latigos as he talked. Jeff picked his bundle out of the trough, then, turning away, met again the eye of the man who had caught his attention before he climbed into the saddle. This time the motion of the man's head was unmistakable. Jeff walked over to where he was standing apart in the corral.

This man stood arrow-straight in fringed, weathered buckskin. His sun-darkened face was smooth, save for a long mustache. Hardness showed in his lean features and cold eyes. His hair hung to the shoulders of his jacket. A rifle was slung across his back; Jeff noted the queer glitter of its short barrel.

Seeing his interest, the man slipped the gun strap and held the rifle out for inspection. He spoke charity: "I've got 'er cased."

Jeff took the gun and looked closely. "What's it cased with?"

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"Skin uv a bull snake."

"Oh!"

"Yep. Nice ridin'."

"Thanks. I ~~was~~ lucky, I reckon."

"Rode plenty, probably."

"Well, yes, sir. Father started me in the saddle when I was just a little shaver. We always had lots of horses—I rode 'em all. Used to break horses for our neighbors."

Again the cold eyes measured Jeff. "Lookin' fur a job?"

"Yes, sir, I am. Had a job here in town on a dray line, but the man sold out, and the new outfit had their own men."

"I kin use a rider."

"What sort of work is it, mister?"

"Rounding up wild horses. You rope?"

"Just a little—I'm not very good at it."

"Me an' my partner kin do the roping. We had another fellow. He pulled out."

"Did you say you wanted to hire somebody? How long would the job last?"

"'Bout a month. No wages. I'll furnish horses an' grub, you kin have a sixth of what we ketch. Might have luck, might not. Last trip we got eight, fetched about six hundred dollars."

Jeff checked his first impulse. "How soon would you have to know?" he asked, then. "I'll have to see a friend of mine first. If I let you know this afternoon will that do?"



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"Yep. I'll be around here, likely. If you don't see me ask 'em where Bill Sanderson is."

Jeff slipped through the gate and started away, then turned back. "Where is it you go to catch the horses?" he asked.

"This side o' the Cimarron, mostly."

"Thanks, Mister Sanderson." Jeff hurried off.

He encountered Alex Carlyle coming down the steps at the main entrance of the Patee House, and drew him aside. "What do you think about it?" he demanded, after relating his talk with Sanderson.

Alex pondered, leaning against the entrance railing. A flush not from the burning May sun showed in his thin cheeks. He looked frail beside Jeff.

"I believe I'd try it, if I were you," he said. "You're in shape to stand hard knocks, I reckon, Jeff? You want to be, if you trail with a bunch of horse hunters."

"That ain't the part that bothers me. I—you know the thing I'm after is to get on the Pony Express. Chet's on, and I won't be satisfied till I'm hooked up with the same outfit he is. But I can't go in every day asking them for a riding job—I've bothered Mr. Majors and your uncle, too, till I'm most ashamed to face them again, for a little while, anyway. But I've got to be doing *something*. Do you reckon I'd lose out entirely with the Pony Express if I throw in with this horse-hunting outfit for a few weeks?"

"I don't think so," Alex averred. "My guess is there'll be chances to get on the Express after a little,



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when some of the new wears off. Some of these riders will get tired of the job, or maybe get sick, I didn't feel any too good myself when I got in with the mail yesterday," he admitted, with a good-natured grimace.

Jeff gave him a glance of friendly concern, in silence.

"Another thing," Alex went on, "this man Sanderson is a top hand on trail. Everybody knows him. If you make good with this outfit it'll show you sure can ride—might help you getting on afterward. Of course you'd be taking a chance, you might not make a thing chasing horses. But most everybody takes a chance once in a while."

"Sure, I reckon that's right."

"You might say this whole Pony Express business is just chance-taking on a big scale. The Express Company hasn't got any government contract for carrying the mail. Senator Gwin of California talked Mr. Russell into believing that the Postmaster General would give the company a contract later on, after they had set up fast mail service to the coast over the central route. Mr. Majors didn't think much of that way of doing business, neither did Mr. Waddell, but Russell had given his word to try it, and they backed him up. They may make some money, and they may lose a lot. That's the way I got the line-up from my uncle."

"Well, I reckon I can take a chance, too," Jeff decided, soberly. He looked at Alex, and Alex as gravely looked at him. "That man said the outfit was



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going 'this side of the Cimarron,' " Jeff added. "What is the Cimarron? Where is it?"

"A river, southwest of here. Starts out on the plains somewhere and runs down into the Indian Country."

"First time I ever heard of it," Jeff mused.

Uneasy silence, then, till Alex spoke. "Well, here's luck, old man."

"Same to you." Jeff gripped the thin hand with his sinewy fingers. "I'll look you up first thing when I get back. You'll still be on the Pony Express, of course?"

"Sure. Sure thing."

Bill Sanderson, his partner Tod Albee, and Jeff crossed the Missouri on the ferry's first trip next morning. Their remuda of fifteen ponies trailed on lead ropes. Saddlebags and two pack ponies carried their supplies—a pup tent, blankets, lariats, hackamores, clogs, grass hobbles, a mess kit, hardtack, bacon, beans, and coffee. Sanderson's snake-cased rifle was in his saddle boot; each rider wore a Colt revolver in a holster tied down with a strip of rawhide. They trooped down the *Denver's* gangplank with a clatter, crossed the wide bottom on the Kansas side of the river, topped the bluffs and headed southwest.

They camped that night far beyond the lonely ranches that dotted the first twenty-five or thirty miles beyond the river.

Jeff woke next morning wondering where he was. The weathered side of the tent was hanging against

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his face; through the raised flap he caught the wild, sweet smell of the plains. Then his brain cleared; he rolled out of his blanket, stiff and saddle-sore. Tod Albee had a clear fire of buffalo chips going in front of the tent; coffee was in the pot, bacon in the blackened frying pan. Sanderson was coming in from the picket line. Jeff, watching him, caught the half-grin that creased his face and felt all at once at home.

Hours later Jeff swung his pony closer to Albee's; spoke above the beat of hoofs: "What's that yonder?"

Albee's distance-set eyes, narrowed against the westering sun, had seen the dark splotch minutes before.

"Buffalo."

The splotch widened; tiny dots showed on its borders. Only keen eyes, noting from time to time, could see that it moved. It lay northwestward on a far ridge and slowly grew more distant as the remuda kept its steady trot.

"Was that a big herd?" Jeff asked.

"No. Maybe a thousand head."

Always ahead on the rolling horizon lay a divide. Jeff at first supposed that when he got to the top of a ridge he would be able to see as far as his eyes could carry. Always, instead, he saw ahead of him another crest, like a wave in a brown-green sea. The short curly buffalo grass was soft beneath the ponies' feet. The flowers of springtime were in bloom.

They topped a ridge late in the fifth day and looked out upon a basin, ringed miles wide with higher



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ground. A group of dots showed on the basin floor. "There's horses," Albee said.

Sanderson scanned the dots with field glasses while the tired remuda stood. His glance roved the nearer side of the basin. "Looks like water yonder," he decided, and swung his pony.

They camped beside a tiny creek bed fringed with dwarfed willows. Sanderson turned in as soon as supper was over. Tod Albee lounged on the curly grass beside the graying campfire. Jeff lingered with him. The ponies grazed on the picket line. The wind was down; the stars blazed clear.

"How do you go at it catching wild horses, Tod? Can't they outrun our ponies?"

"Probably can. But there's a way. Say you and I was to ride out toward this bunch ahead of us here. It looks like about a dozen head, probably a stallion, five or six mares, and some colts or yearlings. They'd see us, see we were strange. Away goes the whole outfit on the run, the stallion driving 'em ahead of him."

"Then what would we do?"

"Ride after 'em. Keep 'em moving all day. Here's the thing of it—horses hate to leave the range they're used to. They'll run from us, but after they go ten or fifteen miles they'll circle back and probably come around within a couple of miles of where they started from. That gives us a chance to hustle over and grab a fresh pony and a bite to eat. Then we got to hurry and catch up with 'em again. Keep 'em on the move

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till about dark, then let 'em drift, and watch with glasses to see where they settle down. We may have to back-track a little—if we stayed too close our ponies might whinný to 'em and start the whole bunch off again."

"Then we come back to camp?"

"Nope, stay right there. Use your saddle for a pillow. Hobble your pony. Wrap up in your saddle blanket."

"And start after them again in the morning?"

"Sure, the next day, and same way for maybe four or five days. Keep a-going, changing ponies right along. By that time the herd'll be so tired you can get in close. Then you can turn 'em, make 'em travel in a circle.

"After a while the weaker ones will just stand and let the others swing around 'em—that's milling. When they've been milled till they're dog-tired, rope 'em and put the clogs on. Takes three hands for that, one ropes, one handles the clogs, and one drives the rest of the herd off a little ways. . . . We'd better get some sleep while we've got a chance."

5

THE CHALLENGE

By COVELLE NEWCOMB



F LINT RYDER sat in the airy dining room of the Rancho Buena Vista. He was alternately reading snatches from the *Western Livestock Journal* and looking expectantly at the hilly road that led from the foot of a slope to the ranch house on its peak.

"Dad's coming!" he shouted suddenly to his mother and brother Bill, at the same time rushing from the room and whistling for his police dog Capitán.

Capitan jumped up from his cool hole under the long front porch and loped ahead, startling a kid goat tied to a fig tree.

Flint ran to meet the dusty Buick touring car as it chugged up the curving road. A feeling of high excitement stirred in his heart and he bounced on the running board, hanging on until his father brought the car to a screeching stop at the rear of the house. When Flint yanked the car door open, Capitán



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squeezed past him and leapt onto the seat, barking and licking Mr. Ryder's face.

"Out, Cap, out!" Flint tugged at Capitán's collar.

Sam Ryder gave the big dog a push and slid out of the car. "Well, Flint!" he said, shaking his son's shoulder good-humoredly, "coming home is better than leaving it."

"It sure is noisier." Flint's blue eyes lighted with a smile.

"Sam!" Mrs. Ryder, followed by Bill, hurried across the yard to greet her husband.

"Hello, Mary. How's everything?" He kissed his wife and hugged her.

"Hi, Dad." Bill held out a lean brown hand. "Have a good trip?"

Mr. Ryder's eyes gleamed and he chuckled. "Great trip, great!"

As he watched his father, Flint's mouth broke into a slow smile. That special chuckle, he knew, concealed a surprise.

"Sam!" Mrs. Ryder narrowed her gray eyes. "You didn't, you didn't bring back another of those useless contraptions, did you?" she demanded, knowing her husband's fondness for returning from trips with unworkable American "improvements" for his Mexican ranch.

"Shush-shush, Mary." He pressed a finger over her lips. "I have a real surprise. Not a water pipe, not a boiler, not an engine. No sir, not this time." Throwing a placating arm about his wife's shoulders, he



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changed the subject. "Has Maruca cooked a pot of beans for me? Good black beans with chili sauce! Man! I'm so hungry I could eat a whole bean field."

His wife sighed lightly. "Yes, Maruca has a pot of beans, but who knows what you have!" Taking his hand, she laughed and they walked together toward the *casa grande*.

"I'll bring your things, Dad," Flint called, opening the car trunk. He lifted out a battered brown suitcase and set it on the ground. Then he rummaged through the depths of the trunk for the surprise, but he found only a topcoat, an empty thermos, and a box of car tools. "Well, that's that," he said, letting down the lid. "Nothing in here." He looked toward his older brother who was wiping the windshield of dust. "If he brought anything, it's not in the car."

"Maybe it's in his pocket," said Bill.

Flint shook his head. His eyes crinkled at the corners. "Dad never brings anything that fits into a pocket."

"Well, take it easy." Bill laughed. "It'll probably be three or four days before we see what it is, but I'll bet you a nickel it's a portable shower bath or a sewing machine for Maruca."

Flint took up the suitcase. "Guess you're right." His voice trailed off into a heavy sigh. "I wish he'd bring us a pair of silver saddles."

"Silver saddles! Is that all?" Bill whistled a sharp note.

Flint's dreams were still on a broad-pommeled sil-

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“ver saddle chased with Roses of Castile when Bill nudged him. “Come on, let’s go in and see what’s doing.”

With Capitán following at their heels, they went into the house. Maruca, the little Indian servant, was scurrying about the *comedor* on bare feet, serving Mr. Ryder a rasher of bacon, fried eggs, beans, a pot of red, tongue-blistering chili sauce, and strong black coffee. Hand-woven Mexican *sarapes* brightened the walls and carpeted the floor of the spacious room. From the windows at either end could be seen shining green views of Buena Vista’s orange groves, sugarcane fields, pastures, and the red-roofed adobe huts of Mexican laborers who worked the ranch.

Mr. Ryder looked up and nodded them to chairs. While he ate, his family looked on. A spell of silence had fallen over them. Now and then his fork scraped against the pottery plate, and a hot breeze stirred a curtain of colored-paper beads that hung before a door leading into the *sala* or living room. Capitán stretched out under the table at Flint’s feet and gave impulsive woofs or thumped his tail on the floor. For seemingly endless minutes Mr. Ryder’s family waited—listening for something, and now they were about to hear it.

Flint’s curiosity mounted as he saw his father push back his chair and take a cigarette from a pack of Belmontes. Now, he knew, there was nothing more for his father to do but strike a wax match, make a waxen tip for the cigarette before lighting it, take a puff and blow a jet of smoke through his nostrils. His

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habits were carried out with the pomp of rituals. This done, he would talk.

"While I was in Torreon," he said, "I saw my old friend, Don Pedro Valdez."

Flint started as though he'd been pricked with a spur. "Isn't he the man who owns a race horse?"

"That's right." Mr. Ryder smiled at his eager-eyed son who faced him with reddening cheeks.

"That horse is something special, isn't he?" The words tumbled out of Bill's mouth.

"Sure as shooting, he's something special."

"Did you see him?" Flint felt thrilled at the thought.

"I saw him." A twinkle of humor lurked in Sam Ryder's eyes. "Don Pedro is moving to Guadalajara. He can't take the horse with him, so he gave him to me." He swallowed a quick sip of coffee and set down the cup with a clink.

Flint and Bill were too surprised to say anything.

"Just as I suspected." Mrs. Ryder threw a despairing glance at her impractical husband. "And what are you going to do with a race horse on a cattle ranch?"

"Oh, Mom!" Flint pleaded, reading disapproval in her eyes.

"Answer me, Sam Ryder," she demanded again, ignoring Flint's plea.

"Calm down, Mary, calm down. In the first place, he isn't the kind of race horse you think he is. He's a Quarter Horse."

"Jeepers!" Flint fairly burst out of his skin.

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“A Quarter Horse? What became of the other three-quarters?”

Flint's merry laugh checked his mother from saying more. “Get whiz, Mom, didn't you ever hear of a Quarter Horse? They're the fastest in the world. They're too heavy for long races, but they can beat the wind for the quarter-mile. Peter McCue could do it in twenty-one seconds flat.” He looked across the table and caught his father's reassuring nod.

“You seem to know all about them.” Mrs. Ryder was puzzled as she met the confident look in her son's eyes.

“Flint's horse-crazy,” scoffed Bill. “Name your favorite horse—he'll tell you all about it. He doesn't read anything but the livestock journals.”

“I saw a Quarter Horse in a rodeo,” answered Flint, disdaining Bill's taunt. “What a horse! He was quicker than a shot.”

“I still can't see what you'll do with him here,” insisted Mrs. Ryder.

“We can make a stock horse of him,” suggested Flint.

“Oh, we can, can we?” said Bill, a hint of jealousy in his voice. “I guess you mean you can.”

“Bill's right,” admitted Mr. Ryder. “It's no snap to make a good stock horse of a race horse. But it can be done if—”

“Sure, let Flint do it,” interrupted Bill. “He thinks he knows more than Nacho about horses.”

“I don't, but I—”

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"Stop this bickering!" Mr. Ryder raised a protesting hand.

"Honest I don't think that, Dad," said Flint, "but if nobody else—I'd—I'd like to try. Maybe I could do it. I've broken some pretty tough broncos."

"I know that, Flint, but don't be too sure of yourself. To handle a race horse isn't the same as handling a bronco. Not at all."

"Okay, but it still doesn't mean I can't."

Mrs. Ryder cut in. "All this arguing won't get you anywhere. If the horse is yours, you'll have to get him here before you can do anything with him. How do you expect to get him from Torreon to Buena Vista? Had you thought of that?"

"Not much—until now," said Mr. Ryder. "There's only one way. Someone will have to go for him and ride him back."

"Nacho?" asked Mrs. Ryder.

"Nacho!" Flint objected. "Dad, you wouldn't send that old horse wrangler, he's never seen a Thoroughbred."

"Does that mean he can't get him?" asked Mrs. Ryder.

"Maybe," said Mr. Ryder, "Nacho wouldn't understand a Thoroughbred. He'd either kill the horse or the horse would kill him."

"Let me get him!" blurted Flint.

"Hold on!" Bill bristled. "I'm older than you. I'll get him. I guess Nacho taught me as many tricks about horses as he taught you."

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"Sure, you're a swell rider but—"

"Sam! You aren't taking them seriously! You're not going to let them bring that horse over those bandit-infested hills and that long stretch of desert! I won't have it. They're both too young. If you have to take a risk, at least let it be Nacho." She looked at her husband, and then at her sons. "Three hundred miles of desert! No! You must be mad." She stopped, astonished, when she saw the determined look in her husband's eyes and the firm twist he gave his cigarette butt in an ash tray.

Like his mother, Flint could tell that his father had come to a decision. He said nothing, but silently hoped that his father would settle his choice on him.

After a few breathless moments Mr. Ryder spoke. "I learned to swim by being thrown into deep water. It's a good way. Bill and Flint are old enough to be responsible. One of them is going for that horse."

Flint saw his mother's mouth twitch a little, then she steadied herself.

"Don't worry, Mom," he said cheerfully. "I'll have him home before you know I've gone."

"Is that so?" Bill flouted. "What about me?"

Mr. Ryder smiled in spite of himself. "Hold on, both of you. I said one of you could go, but I didn't say which one. As far as I'm concerned, your chances are even, but you'll have to settle the matter yourselves. As soon as you do—"

"They settle it? They'll half kill themselves in a fight to go," said Mrs. Ryder.



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"There'll be no fighting." He smiled sympathizingly at his wife. "Nacho is due to break some broncos today. Flint and Bill can try their horsemanship by riding one of them. He who hangs on longest goes to Torreon. Fair?"

"Fair." The boys answered together.

"I'll race you to the corral!" Bill sprang up from the table. "If I beat you, I ride first."

"You're on."

They dashed from the house to the stable. Flint's driving legs got him there first. A few moments later, Mr. Ryder drove past, honked twice, and bumped along the road to the corral. For all his haste, Flint, as usual, took good care of his horse. He cleaned its hoofs, curried its coat, and made sure that the saddle cloth lay smooth before throwing the heavy wooden saddle in place. Bill, less careful, was ready to leave the stable when Flint was still adjusting the cinch strap.

By the time Flint led his horse from its stall, Bill was out of sight, only a cloud of dust showing that he had just disappeared down the steep winding road from the high mesa to the valley. Throwing himself into the saddle, Flint urged his mount to a safe pace halfway between a trot and a gallop, and sped after his brother.

The road dropped rapidly. For a mile or so it curved past slopes planted with orange and tangerine trees, crossed bridges, then lay straight and level, flanked by fields of sugar cane and corn. Now Flint let loose on



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the reins and his horse broke into a full, swift gallop. As he came in sight of Bill, he called a loud halloo. Bill looked back, returned the shout, and gave his horse the spur. Flint pressed ahead. Length by length, he moved up, faster, faster, until he was only a length behind—half a length. The corral was near; the bars of the gate were down. With one last burst of speed Bill rode in, leading by a neck.

Flint vaulted from his horse and smiled. "You win. You're first."

"You almost made it, Flint," said Mr. Ryder, consulting his wristwatch. "Took you nine minutes and three seconds. Not bad, eh, Nacho?" He turned to the head horse wrangler standing by the car.

Nacho dismissed the feat with a shrug. "*Bucno*," he said, indifferently. "I tie up your beast, *Huerito*—Blondie."

"No, thanks, Nacho," Flint grasped the reins. "I'll take him. He knows me better."

"That *muchacho*!" Nacho shoved his straw sombrero to the back of his head and mopped his face with a red bandana, then knotted it about his neck. "He trust his horse to no one—not even me."

"Don't mind him, Nacho." Mr. Ryder looked from Nacho to his son tying his horse to a madrone tree near the corral fence. "Flint likes to manage his own property."

"*Sí, señor*." Nacho lighted a cigarette. "The huerito would eat me if I touch his plug." He frowned a little. "I never tell him to talk to a horse



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like to a *señorita* or *amigo*. *Caramba!* He tell me to make friend with horse! Señor Bill know better what to do. Sí, sí—like I teach him.”

“*Andale*, Nacho! Bring the bronco. Hurry!” Bill call impatiently.

“*Ya voy*—presently.”

As Nacho came into the corral, leading a little spotted horse with a weather-roughened coat, Flint perched himself on the top pole of the fence, a ring-side seat already filled with Mexican cowboys. He snapped the toes of his boots under the third rail and leaned forward

“Gee, that’s a wild one!” he exclaimed to the Mexican beside him, seeing the two horsemen with Nacho press close to calm the blindfolded animal.

The Mexican showed his teeth in a wide grin. “You bet, tough customer.”

The horse quieted down with the nearness of the tame horses, but the instant Nacho threw the wooden saddle on its back it gave a start that nearly knocked him down.

Nacho quickly reached for the cinch.

“Make it good and tight,” ordered Bill.

Flint watched nervously. Why must Nacho tighten the girth until it cut into the skin? After the bronco was saddled, its ears twitched, its muscles trembled. The air became as tense as a guitar string.

Bill grabbed a swatch of mane and put his left foot in the stirrup. Then, as Nacho tore away the blindfold, he swung himself into the saddle.

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The horse gave a frightful pitch, nearly unseating Bill, then stopped, trembling violently. A light spur from Bill's heels sent it springing forward, kicking to right and left. It wheeled and bucked and, with every heave of its back, nearly shook him to pieces. Shouts and *vivas* broke from the cowboys as it reared and sprang with its rider.

Suddenly Bill pitched from the saddle and landed in a heap almost under the horse's hoofs. Wranglers instantly bore down on it and drew it safely away.

Bill scrambled to his feet, wiping his mouth of dust. "How long was I on?"

"Two minutes," said Mr. Ryder. "Swell work, Bill."

"Gee, Bill, are you hurt?" Flint stood beside him. He stared admiringly at his brother. "You sure did stick."

"Two minutes," boasted Bill. "He's savage! Think he's too much for you?"

"Watch me!"

"You'll be going some if you beat Bill," said Mr. Ryder.

Nacho shook his head doubtfully.

Calmly, Flint approached the horse. He relaxed the cutting cinch, gathered the reins, and sprang into the saddle. The horse let out a scream, then reared and jumped up and down, up and down, with jolting, stiff-legged plunges. But Flint held on. A dig with his heels at each take-off kept him from being thrown.

Suddenly the horse sprang a new trick! It came





It wheeled and bucked and nearly shook him to pieces!

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over backward. Flint barely got clear. The bronco rolled and slashed and got to its feet, only to find Flint on its back again.

Crazy with excitement, the Mexicans split the air with their yells. "Wiva, Huerito! Viva!" This was riding!

For three thrill-packed minutes the horse made desperate efforts to unseat him, then its knees sagged, haunches caved, and foam dripped from its jaws. The bronco was exhausted.

Flint patted its neck and sat at ease as the bronco ran down the corral. Nacho and another horseman rode up alongside. Flint sprang to the ground.

Bill came running toward him. "You win—and how! If you can tame that brute, you can handle Don Pedro's horse."

"Thanks, Bill."

6

MIDNIGHT

By WILL JAMES



RUNNING MUSTANGS had got to be an old game for me; it'd got so that instead of getting some pleasure and excitement out of seeing a wild bunch running smooth into our trap corrals I was finding myself wishing they'd break through the wings and get away.

Now that was no way for a mustang runner to feel but I figgered I just loved horses too well, and thinking it over I was kind of glad I felt that way. I seen that the money I'd get out of the sales of 'em didn't matter so much to me as the liberty I was helping take away from the slick wild studs, mares, and specially the little colts. Yes, sir, it was like getting blood money only worse.

I may be called chicken-hearted and all that but it's my feelings, and them same feelings come from *knowing* horses, and being with 'em steady enough so I near savvy horse language. My first light of day



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was split by the shape of a horse tied back of the wagon I was born 'in, and from then on horses was my main interest.

I'd got to be a good rider, and as I roamed the countries of the United States, Mexico and Canada, riding for the big cow and horse outfits of them countries I rode many a different horse in as many a different place and fix. There was times when the horse under me meant my life, specially once in Old Mexico, that once I sure can't forget, and then again, crossing the deserts I did cross, most always in strange territory and no arrows pointing as to the whereabouts of moisture, I had to depend altogether on the good horse under me wether the next water was twelve or sometimes forty-eight hours away.

With all the rambling I done which was for no reason at all only to fill the craving of a cowpuncher what always wanted to drift over that blue ridge ahead, my life was pretty well with my horse and I found as I covered the country, met different folks, and seen many towns, that the pin-eared pony under me (whichever one it was) was a powerful friend, powerful in confidence and strength. There was no suspicious question asked by him, nor "when do we eat." His rambling qualities was all mine to use as I seen fit, and I never abused it which is why I can say that I never was set afoot. Sometimes I had horses that was sort of fidgety and was told they'd leave me first chance they got wether they was hobbled or not but somehow I never was left, not even when the feed



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was scattered and no water for 'em to drink, and I've had a few ponies on such long cross-country trails that stayed close to camp with nothing on 'em that'd hinder 'em from hitting out if they wanted to.

A horse got to mean a heap more to me than just an animal to carry me around, he got to be my friend, I went fifty-fifty with him, and even though some showed me fight and I treated 'em a little rough there'd come a time when we'd have an understanding and we'd agree that we was both pretty good fellers after all.

And now that things are explained some, it all may be understood why running mustangs, catching 'em, and selling 'em to any hombre that wanted 'em kind of got un-der my skin and where I live. I didn't see why I should help catch and make slaves out of them wild ones that was so free. Any and all of 'em was my friends—they was horseflesh.

The boys wasn't at all pleased when I told 'em I'd decided to leave and wanted to know why, but I kept my sentiments to myself and remarked that I'd like to go riding for a cow outfit for a change. That seemed to satisfy 'em some and when they see I was bound to go they didn't argue. We started to divvy up the amount of ponies caught so as I'd get my share, and figgered fourteen head was coming to me. There was two days' catch already in the round corral of the trap and from that little bunch we picked out them I was to get.

There was a black stud in that bunch that I couldn't

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help but notice—I'd kept track of him ever since he was spotted the day before. He was young and all horse, and acted like he had his full share of brains. I wondered some how he come to get caught, and then again I had to size up the trap noticing how easy a horse, even a human, could be fooled, so well we'd built it.

The big main corral took in over an acre of ground; the fine, strong woven wire fastened on the junipers and piñons wasn't at all to be seen, specially by horses going at full speed, and the strength and height of that fence would of held a herd of stampeding buffalo.

Knowing that trap as I did, it was no wonder after all that black horse *was* caught. Nothing against his thinking ability, I thought, and as I watches him moving around wild-eyed seeming like to take a last long look at the steep hills he knowed so well I finds myself saying, "Little horse, I'm daggone sorry I helped catch you."

Right then I wanted that black horse, and I was sure going to get him if I could. I' maneuvrs around a lot and finally decides to offer the boys any three of the wild ones that'd been turned over to me as my share in trade for the black. It took a lot of persuading, 'cause that black stud ranked way above the average, but the boys seeing that I wanted him so bad and me offering one more horse for him which made four, thought best to let me have him.

It was early the next morning when the black and



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the other ten horses I still had left was started away from the trap. Three of the boys was helping me keep 'em together, and as the wild ones all had to have one front foot tied up, it hindered 'em considerable to go faster than a walk, but that's what we wanted. We traveled slow and steady. The ponies tried to get away often, but always there was a rider keeping up with 'em on easy lope, and they finally seen where they had to give in and travel along the way *we* wanted 'em.

Fifteen miles or so away from the trap and going over a low summit, we get sight of a small high-fenced pasture, and to one side was the corrals. There was a cabin against the aspens and as I takes in the layout I recognizes it to be one of the Three T's Cattle Company's cow camps.

I decided we'd gone far enough with them horses for one day, so we corralled 'em there, and the boys went back after me telling 'em the ponies was herd-broke enough so I could handle 'em the next day by my lonesome, but they was some dubious about one man being able to do all that, even *if* the wild ones was tired, one foot tied up, and not aching to run.

The cabin was deserted, and I was glad of it, for I wasn't wanting company right then, I wanted to think. I went to sleep thinking and dreamt I was catching wild horses by the hundreds, and selling 'em to big slough-footed "hawnyawks" what started beating 'em over the heads with clubs. I caught one big white stud and he just followed me in the trap. It all struck me as too easy to catch 'em, and the little



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money I was getting for 'em turned out to be a scab on my feelings compared to the price freedom was worth to them ponies.

I woke up early next morning and the memory of that dream was still with me, and when I pulled on my boots, built a fire and put on the coffee, I had visions of that black horse in the corral looking through a collar and pulling a plow in Alabama or some other such country.

I went outside, and while waiting for the coffee to come to a boil I struts out to the corral to take a look at the ponies. They're all bunched up, heads down, and ganted up, but soon as they see me they start milling, all heads up and a-snorting. I looks through the corral bars at 'em and watches 'em.

The black stud is closest to me and kinda protect-ing the mares and younger stock, there's a look in his eye that kinda reminds me of a man waiting for a sentence from the judge, only the spirit is still there and mighty challenging the same as to say, "What did I do?"

A little two-year-old filly slides up alongside of him and stares at me. I can see fear in her eyes and a kinda innocent wondering as to what this was all about, this being run into a trap, roped, a foot tied up, and then drove into another place with *bars* around.

All is quiet for a spell in the corral, a meadow lark is tuning up on a fence post close by, and with the light morning breeze coming through the junipers



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and piñons there's a feeling for everything that lives to just sun itself, listen, and breathe in.

Then it came to me how one time I'd got so homesick for just what I was experiencing right then, the country, and everything that was in it—I'd been East to a big town and got stranded there—that I'd given my right arm just so I got back.

When I come to and looked back in the corral, the black horse was looking way over the bars to the top of a big ridge. Out there was a small bunch of mustangs enjoying their freedom for all they was worth. So far there was no chance of a collar for them, and whether it was imagination or plain facts that I could see in that black stud's face, I sure made it out that he understood all that. He was seeing was *past*, the shady junipers, the mountain streams, green grass and white sage was all to be left behind, even his little bunch of mares was going to be separated from him and took to goodness knows where.

Yès, sir! Thinking it all over that way sure made it hard to take. I didn't want to get sentimental, but daggone it I couldn't help but realize that I was the judge sentencing 'em to confinement and hard labor just for the few lousy dollars they'd bring.

Sure enough, I was the judge and could do as I blamed please. It struck me queer that it didn't come to me sooner.

I wasn't hesitating none as I picked up my rope and opened the gate into the corral, I worked fast as I caught each wild one, throwed him and took off the

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rope that was fastened from the tail to the front foot.

They was all foot-loose excepting the black. I hadn't passed judgment on him as yet, but I knowed he wasn't going to be shipped to no cotton field, and the worst that could come his way would be to break him for my own saddle horse.

I opened the corral gate and lets the others out, watches 'em a spell, then turns to watch the black. "Little horse," I says to him, "your good looks and build are against you—"

But it was sure hard to let the others go and keep him in that way, it didn't seem square and the little horse was sure worrying about his bunch leaving him all by his lonesome, in a big corral with a human, and then I thinks of all the saddle horses I already had, of all the others I could get that's been raised under fence and never knowed wild freedom.

Then my rope sings out once more, in no time his front foot is loose, the gate is open, and nothing in front of him but the high ridges of the country he knowed so well.

For a second I feel like kicking myself for letting such a horse go. He left me and the corral seemed like without touching the earth, floating out a ways, then turned and stood on his tiptoes, shook his head at me, let out a long whistle the same as to say "this is sure a surprise" and away he went, right on the trail his mares had took.

My heart went up my throat for a minute, I'd never seen a prettier picture to look at than that horse



Midnight

when he ambled away. The sight of him didn't seem to fit in with a saddle on his back, and a heap less with a collar around his neck and following furrows instead of the mountain trails he was to run on once more.

I felt some relieved and thankful as I started back for the cabin. The coffee had boiled over while I was at the corral, and put the fire out, but I finds myself whistling and plumb contented with everything in general as I gathers kindling and starts the fire once again.

It was a few days later when I rides in on one of the Three T's round-up wagons, gets a job, a good string of company ponies, and goes to work. The wagon was on a big circle and making a new camp every day towards the mustang territory.

I was trying to get used to riding for a cow outfit once more, and it was hard. I'd find myself hankering to run mustangs but then I'd see them wild ponies crowded into stock cars and my hankering would die down sudden.

One day a couple of the boys rode up to the parada (main herd) from circle with a very few head of stock and it set me to wondering how come their horses could be so tired in that half-a-day's ride, but I didn't have to wonder long, for soon as they got near me one of 'em says, "We seen him!"

"Seen who?" I asks.

"Why, that black stud Midnight. Ain't yo' ever heard of him?"

"I don't know," I says, but it wasn't just a few minutes till I did know.

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From all I was told right then it seemed like that Midnight horse was sure a wonder. It was rumored he was at least a half standard, but nobody was worried about that, the main thing was that he could sure run and what's more, keep it up. '

"We spotted him early this morning," says one of the boys, "and soon as we did we naturally forgot all about cows. We took turns relaying on him. We had fast horses too, but we'd just as well tried to relay after a runaway locomotive."

I learned he had been caught once and broke to ride, but his mammy was a mustang, he'd been born and raised on the high pinnacles of the wild horse country, and one day when his owner thought it was safe to turn him out in a small pasture for a chance at green grass the horse just up and disappeared. The fences he had to cross to the open country never seemed to hinder him, and even though he was some three hundred miles from his home range, it was but a week or so later when some rider spotted him there again.

A two hundred dollar reward was offered for anyone that caught him. Many a good horse was tired out by different riders trying to get near him, traps was built, but Midnight had been caught once, and the supposed-to-be-wise fox was dumb compared to that horse.

I was getting right curious about then, and finally I asks for a full description of that flying hunk of horse-flesh.

I'm holding my breath some as I'm told that his



Midnight

weight is around eleven hundred, pure black, and perfect built, and a small brand on his neck right under his mane, a "C."

Yep! that was him, none other than that black horse I turned loose.

I started wondering how *we* caught him so easy, but a vision of that trap came to me again. It wasn't at all like the traps other mustangers of that country ever built, and that's what got Midnight. We had him thinking he was getting away from us easy, when at the same time he was running right inside the strong, invisible, net fence.

A picture of him came to my mind as he looked when I turned him loose that day now a couple of weeks past, and then I thought of the two hundred that was offered to anybody who'd run him in. That was a lot of money for a mustang, but somehow it didn't seem to be much after all, not comparing with Midnight.

It was late in the fall when I seen the black stud again. Him and his little bunch was sunning themselves on the side of a high ridge. A sarvisberry bush was between me and them, and tying my horse to a juniper, I sneaks up towards 'em, making sure to keep out of sight. I figgered I'd be about two hundred yards from the bunch once I got near the berry bush, but when I got there and straightened up to take a peek through the branches, the wild bunch had plumb evaporated off the earth. I could see for a mile around me but all I could tell of the whereabouts of Midnight



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and his mares was a light dust away around the point of the ridge.

"Pretty wise horse," I thinks, but somehow I felt relieved a lot to know he was going to make himself mighty hard to catch.

The winter that came was a tough one, the snow was deep and grass was hard to get. I was still riding for the Three T's outfit and was kept mighty busy bringing whatever stock I'd find what needed feed, and as I was riding the country for such and making trails out for snowbound cattle I had a good chance to watch how the wild horses was making it.

They wasn't making it very good, and as the already long winter seemed to never want to break I noticed that the bunches was getting smaller, many of the old mares layed down never to get up, and the cayotes was getting fat.

Midnight and his bunch was nowheres to be seen, and I got kind of worried that some hombre wanting that two hundred dollars right bad had started out after him with grain-fed horses, and the black horse being kinda weaker on account of the grass being hard to get at might've let a rope sneak up on him and draw up around his neck.

I knowed of quite a few riders that calculated to get him that winter, and I knowed that if he wasn't already caught, he'd sure been fogged a good many times.

I often wished that I'd hung on to him while I had him, and give him as much freedom as I could,



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just so nobody pestered him. I'd forgot that the horse already belonged to somebody else and I'd have to give him up anyway, but that pony had got under my skin pretty deep. I just wanted to do a good turn to horseflesh in general by leaving him and all the other wild ones as they was.

Winter finally broke up and spring with warm weather had come, when as I'm riding along one day tailing up weak stock, I finds that all my worries about the black stud getting caught was for nothing.

I was in the bottom of a boggy wash helping a bellerer critter up on her feet. As luck would have it my horse was hid, and as for me, only my head was sticking up above the bank, when I happened to notice the little wild bunch filing in towards me from over a low ridge. I recognized Midnight's mares by their color and markings, but I couldn't make out that shaggy, faded, long-haired horse trailing in along behind quite a ways. He was kind of a dirty brown.

I stood there in the mud up above my ankles and plumb forgot the wild-eyed cow that was so much in need of a boost to dry ground, all my interest was for spotting Midnight, and my heart went up my throat as I noticed the faded brown horse. That couldn't be Midnight, I thought, Midnight must of got caught some way and this shadow of a horse just naturally appropriated the bunch.

But as I keeps on watching 'em trail in and getting closer there's points about that shaggy pony in the rear that strikes me familiar. He looks barely able to

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pack his own weight, and his weight wasn't much right then for I could see his ribs mighty plain even through the long winter hair. All the other ponies had started to shed off some and was halfways slick, but not him.

The bunch was only a couple of ropes' length away from me as they trailed in the boggy wash to get a drink of the snow water, and I had to hug the bank to keep out of sight and stick my head in a sagebrush so as I could see without them seeing me.

Then I recognized Midnight. That poor son of a gun was sure well disguised with whatever ailed him, and when I got a good look at that head of his I thought sure a rattler had bit him. His jaws and throat was all swelled up plumb to his ears, but as I studies him I seen it wasn't a snake's doings. It was distemper at its worst, and the end was as sure as if he'd been dead unless I could catch him and take care of him.

I'm out on my best horse the next morning, and making sure the corral gate was wide open and the wings to it in good shape I headed for the quickest way of locating Midnight. I had no trouble there, and run onto him and his bunch when only a couple of hours away from camp.

I thought he was weak enough so I could ride right in on him and rope him on the spot, but I was fooled mighty bad. He left me like I was standing still, and tail up he headed for the roughest country he could find, me right after him.

My horse was grain-fed, steady, strong, and in fine



Midnight

shape to run, but as the running kept up over wash-outs, mountains, and steep ridges, for the big part of that day, I seen where there was less hope of ever getting within roping distance of the black.

Daggone that horse anyway. I was finding myself cussing and admiring him at the same time. I was afraid he'd run himself to death rather than let any rider get near him, and I thought some of letting him go, only I knowed the distemper would kill him sure, and I wanted to save him.

I made a big circle and covered a lot of territory, my horse was getting mighty tired, and as I pushed on the trail of Midnight and got to within a few miles of my camp, I branched off and let him go. I was going to get me a fresh horse.

I was on his trail again by sundown, and an hour or so later a big moon came up to help me keep track of the dust Midnight was making. That big moon was near halfways up the sky when I begins to see signs of the black horse weakening. I feels mighty sorry for the poor devil right then, and as I uncoils my rope and gets ready to dab it on him I says to him, "Midnight, old horse, I'm only trying to help you."

Then my rope sails out and snares him. He didn't fight as I drawed up my slack and stopped him, instead his head hung down near the ground and if I ever seen a picture marking the end of the trail, there was one.

It was daybreak as we finally reached the corral and sheds of my camp. In a short while I'd lanced and



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doctored up his throat, good as any vet could of done, made him swallow a good stiff dose of medicine I had on hand for that purpose in case any of my ponies ever got layed-up that way, and, seeing he had plenty to eat and drink in case he'd want it I started towards the cabin to cook me a bait. That done and consumed I caught me another fresh horse and rode out for that day's work.

I'd been doctoring up on Midnight for a week without sign he ever would recuperate. He was the same as the day I brought him in and I was getting scared that he never would come out of it. Every night and morning as I'd go to give him his medicine I'd stand there and watch him for a spell. He'd got used to that and being that my visits that way meant some relief to his suffering he got to looking for me, and would nicker kinda soft as he'd get sight of me.

If I could only get him to eat the grain I'd bring there'd be a chance but he didn't seem to know what grain was, and from that I got the idea he hadn't been treated any too well that first time he was caught. I'd kept sprinkling some of that grain in the hay so as he'd get used to the taste and begin looking for it, but he wasn't eating much hay and it took quite a long time before I begin noticing that the grain I'd put in the box had been touched. From then on, he started eating it and gradually got so he'd clean up all I'd give him.

There was the beginning of a big change in the little horse after that. The powders I'd mix in the



Midnight

grain started to working on him, the swelling on his neck went down, his eyes showed brighter, and he began to shed the long faded winter hair. After that it was easy, a couple of weeks more care and he was strong as ever again, all he needed was the green grass that was all over hills by now. It was time for me to turn him loose—and that's what I did.

It was near sundown when I led him out from under the shed, through the corral where I'd let him out of once before near a year past, and on out to where he'd be free to go. I took the hackamore off his head—nothing was holding him—but this time he just stood there, his head was high and his eyes was taking in the big country around him.

He spoke plainer than a human when, after taking long appreciating breaths of the cool spring air, he sniffed at my shoulder and looked up the hills again. He wasn't wondering or caring if I understood him so long as he understood me, and that he did—he knowed I was with him for all the freedom these valleys and mountains could give him.

It was a couple of months later when one of the cowboys rode up to my camp on his way to the home ranch, stopped with me a night, and before he left the next morning dropped me some information that caused me to do a heap of thinking.

It appeared like some outfit had moved in on this range and was going to clean it out of all the wild horses that was on it. They had permits and contracts to do that and seemed like the capital to go through

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with it. Most of 'em was foreign hombres that craved for other excitements than just jazz, and getting tired of spending their old man's money, all in one place had framed it up to 'come West and do 'll that *for a change*.

They was bringing along some fast thoroughbreds, and I couldn't help but wonder how long them poor spindle-legged ponies would last in these rocks and shale. They'd be as helpless as the hombres riding 'em. If it'd been only them highbloods I'd just laughed and felt mighty safe for the wild ones, but no such luck, they was paying top wages and hiring the best mustang runners in the country.

As I heard it from that cowboy it was sure some expensive layout, there was big wagonloads of fancy grub and fancier drinks, air mattresses and pillows, tents and folding bathtubs and tables, perfume and chewing gum, etc., etc.—Yep! they was going to *rough it*.

“But I'm thinking,” says the cowboy as he left, “that with the wild horse hunters they hired, that black stud Midnight is going to find hisself in a trap once more, and somehow I'd kinda hate to see them catch that horse.”

For a few weeks that outfit was busy building traps. I seen they was going at it big as I rode through one of 'em one day, and as I talked to one of the pilgrims who I'd found busy picking woodticks out of his brand-new Angora chaps, I also seen they had big visions of cleaning this country of the mustangs along with making a potful of money.



Midnight

"And it's the greatest sport I know of," says that hombre as he reaches for another woodtick next to his ear.

"Yeh," I say to myself as I rides away, "I'm not wishing him harm, but I hope he breaks his neck at it."

There was in the neighborhood of a thousand head of mustangs in that country, and it wasn't long when the hills and white sage flats was being tore by running hoofs, a steady haze of fine dust was floating in the air and could be seen for miles around, and at night I could see signal fires. Some greenhorn had got lost or set afoot.

The hired mustang runners was having a hard time of it; one told me one day they'd of caught twice as many if them pilgrims wasn't around. "Two of the boys was brñging in a nice bunch yesterday," he was saying. "They had 'em to within a few yards of the gate and as good as caught, when up from behind a rock jumps a pilgrim and hollers, 'That's the good boys, step on 'em!' Well, the ponies turned quicker than a flash and *they* done all the stepping, a good thirty head got away."

I was glad to hear that in a way, but I was careful not to show it. I was thinking that after all Midnight and his little bunch had a chance at their freedom, and I fñds myself whisling a pretty lively tune as I rode on.

I hadn't seen Midnight only once since I turned him loose that last time, and I had a hunch that he'd



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changed his range on account of these mustangers keeping him on the dodge, but then again this wasn't the only outfit that was out for the wild ones. The whole country for a hundred miles around was full of riders out for the fuzztails (mustangs), and I couldn't figger out where that horse and his little bunch could go where they'd be safe.

But nobody had seen the black stud, and everybody was wanting him. I was asked often if I'd seen any sign of him, and as I'd go on a-riding the country keeping tab on the company's cattle that was on the same range as the wild ones, I was watching steady for him, but he couldn't be seen anywheres.

Come a time when it was easy to notice that the mustangs was fast disappeating. I could ride for a week at a stretch without seeing more than a few head where some months before I could of counted hundreds. I'd run acrost little colts, too young to keep up and left behind. Their mammies had stayed with 'em long as they could but as the riders would gain on 'em fast, fear would get the best of 'em, and the poor little devils would be left behind to shift for themselves before they was able to, and keep a-nickering and a-circling for the mammy that never came back. She'd be in the trap.

Carloads of wild ones was being shipped every month to all points of the U. S. wherever there was a market for 'em. They was sold to farmers and drug to the farm back of a wagon, the trip in the stock cars, not mentioning their experiences in the trap,



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took most of the heart out of 'em, and there was no fight much as the collar was slipped around their necks and hooked up alongside the gentle farm horse—a big change from the tall peaks, mountain streams near hid with quaking asp, bunch grass, and white sage.

It was late fall and the air was getting mighty crimp when the mustang-running outfits started pulling up their tent pins and moving out, the country looked mighty silent and deserted and all the black dots that could be seen at a distance wasn't mustangs no more, it was mighty safe to say that them black dots was cattle. . . .

I rides up to the pilgrim camp one day just as one of 'em is putting away his cold-cream and snake-bite outfit, and inquires how they all enjoyed the country and mustang trapping.

"Oh, the country is great, and mustang trapping is a ripping sport," I'm told, "but we lost a few thousand dollars on the deal which don't make it so good. Besides cur blooded horses are ruined.

"And by the way," goes on that same hombre, "have you seen that black stallion they call Midnight anywheres? I see by the San Jacinto *News* that the reward on the horse is withdrawn, also the ownership, so he is free to anyone who catches him, I understand."

"Yes," I says, tickled to death at the new, "but there's a catch to it and that's *catching him*."

"Free to anyone who catches him," stayed in my mind for a good many days, but where could that son



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of a gun be? I tried to think of all the hiding spots there was, I knowed 'em all well, I thought, but I also knowed that all them hiding spots had been rode into and the mustangs there had been caught. I was getting mighty worried that Midnight and his little bunch might by now be somewheres where the fences are thick and the fields are small, a couple of thousand miles away.

It's early one morning when I notices one of my saddle horses had got through the pasture fence and left. Soon I was on his trail to bring him back, and that trail led through the aspens back of my cabin and on up to a big granite ledge where it was lost on the rocky ground. Figgering on making a short cut to where I can spot that pony, I leaves my horse tied to a buckbrush and climbs over the granite ledge. When I gets up there, there's another ledge, and then another one, and by the time I gets to the top of all of 'em I'm pretty high.

I was some surprised to find a spring up there, fine clear water that run only a short ways and sunk in the ground again, but what surprised me most was the horse tracks around it. How could a horse ever get up here, I thought, but they was here sure enough. I noticed the feed was awful short and scarce and I wondered if it was because them horses couldn't get down as easy as they got up

Investigating around and looking over big granite boulders I can make out horses' backs a-shining in the sun. They're feeding in their small territory, and I



Midnight

can tell they're feeling pretty safe, but as I moves around, a head comes up, ears pointed my way, and wild eyes a staring at me.

In that second I recognized the black stud Midnight.

There's a loud snort and whistle, and like a bunch of quail Midnight and his bunch left that spot for higher ground and where they could see all around 'em, but a man afoot was something new and not so much to run away from, and finally they stood off at a good distance and watched me.

The surprise of finding Midnight, and so close to my camp, left me able to do nothing but set where I was and do my share of watching. In a little while I started talking to him and I could see he sure remembered and recognized me. His wild look disappeared and he made a half circle as if to come my way. I wished he'd come closer, but I hadn't broke him to that. I hadn't broke him to anything, I'd only tried to give him to understand that he was safe of that freedom as long as he lived.

I knowed he understood ever since that second time I turned him loose. The proof of that was him picking his hiding place as close to my camp as he could get while the mustang runners was in the country. I know he'd been there all the last few months, and I know there was many a time when he looked down in my cabin, which was only a half a mile or so away, while I was wondering where he could be.

I seen him looking down at me that way the next



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morning. He was hard to see amongst the scrub mahogany, but it's a wonder, I thought, why it never come to me to look up there.

Somehow or other, Midnight and his bunch got down off their hiding place. The mustang runners had all left the country, and as I rode up on the small bunch of remaining wild ones one day and watched 'em lope away toward the flat, I knowed they was safe.

I knowed they'd come back if they ever got crowded, and to that hiding place which nobody else knowed of but us 'uns.

7

SPURS FOR ANTONIA

By K. W. EYRE



DOWN at the barn, the milk cows were beginning to stir and rustle in the sweet-smelling hay. Manuela's black hens were pulling their heads out from under their wings, but at the ranch house everyone was still asleep when Romero opened the kitchen door and tiptoed clumsily across the floor. He lighted the lamp on the shelf above the sink and looked quickly at the woodbox.

Good! Full to the top with oak chunks and fine dry kindling. A hot blaze under the frying pan and coffee pot would be only a matter of seconds. Breakfast would be ready in a wink, in spite of Manuela's scoffing boast that she was the only one on the ranch who could cook a respectable meal. Better walk softly! She would take a rolling pin to him if he spoiled her sleep, that fat, lazy sister of his!

Coffee, eggs, warmed-over *tortillas*, and honey to spread on them, amber brown, from the hives in Sage

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Canyon. Romero nodded with satisfaction, and licked his sticky fingers as he set the waxy honeycomb on the table and poured milk in a glass. His little Tonita liked milk when the cream floated on top, thick and lumpy. While he smiled affectionately, thinking about her, the hall door opened and Antonia ran in with an excited, whispered good morning.

"*Buenas días!* Am I on time, Romero? I was scared the clock wouldn't go off! Manuela's still asleep. She didn't hear a thing, even when my boots dropped on the floor!"

She giggled, at the thought of Manuela deep in her blankets, and sitting down at the table she began to eat as fast as she could get her fork to her mouth.

Spring roundup time had come at last. Though it was only four o'clock and still dark, she and Romero would soon be riding out of the corral to catch up with her father and the Aguas Vivas outfit. The boss had been in the hills with his *vaqueros* for more than a week, rounding up the four thousand head of cattle that were scattered from the wide oak-shaded valleys of the flatlands to the rough, brushy wild country that lay far to the north and west, almost in sound of the sea.

Antonia sighed blissfully, thinking of the day ahead. Only a few short months ago she had never even been on a horse. She had never done anything more exciting than take stupid walks along prim streets with Great Aunt Alicia; nothing more interesting than sitting in the parlour on winter afternoons,



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close to the stuffy little coal grate, her face burning hot as she learned to stitch wool roses on a piece of scratchy canvas. And now, today, she and Lucky were going to be part of a rodeo!

When breakfast was over and the kitchen left tidy enough to meet Manuela's sharp eyes, Antonia and Romero saddled their horses and rode out of the corral. With a quick slap of her knotted reins on Lucky's flanks, Antonia hurried ahead to swing open the wide heavy gate.

"I can do it myself," she insisted importantly, leaning out of the saddle and struggling with the bars. "You don't have to help me at all." Romero's black eyes under their scraggly brows were bright with approval as she sidled her horse handily against the gate and made him stand quietly while she dropped the wire loop over the fence post.

The grass was high against their stirrups as they took the river trail. After the long late rains the feed had grown magically, tall and sweet and full of strength, and Antonia knew, confidently and happily, that a good year lay ahead for the boss of the Aguas Vivas rancho. A good year for the Sloane family, too. No doubt, now, about those long pants for Joe.

Humming a contented, wordless little song, she let Lucky carry her along through the poppies and purple lupine, his head tossing in time with the quick step of his newly shod hoofs and the jingle of bit and bridle. A smart cow pony knew what to expect on a fine spring morning like this. When the long line of bawl-

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ing, white-faced cattle wound off the hills with the Aguas Vivas outfit riding herd behind them, he would have his eager, sweating, flying-hoofed share in the important business of driving them to the holding corrals to wait their turn for parting out and vaccination and branding.

"How much longer will the rodeo last, Romero?" Antonia asked, leaning out of the saddle to pick a yellow poppy for her hat band. "Till the end of the week?"

"Yes," the old *Californio* answered, "and don't forget, Tonita, when the hard work is over, when the *riatas* have been thrown in the last loops, when the branding irons have cooled, then will come the barbecue down by the willows."

"Will it be fun?"

"More than you can imagine, *amigacita*," Romero nodded, his eyes sparkling. "This year, because you have brought us luck, because the grass is high, your father has invited all the neighbors. There will be steaks from a fat steer, and *frijoles* to feed a hundred people! The *patrón* considers it proper that the countryside meet his daughter."

"I can't wait! Will you play your guitar, Romero? Will you sing, the way you do down at the bunk house? We can hear you, every night after supper. Pop likes the song about the jumping flea, but I like the one about the star, best."

"*Estrellita? Si*, that is a song you shall have at the barbecue, I promise."



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Two hours later Antonia reined in Lucky and looked anxiously along the high ridge that led to Moon Valley. "Isn't this where Pops said to wait, Romero? You don't think he could have driven the cattle around the other way? I'd hate to miss anything." Her face clouded as she spoke, and her gray eyes were sulky. "I wish I could have gone along and stayed all week with him! Camping out would be wonderful. Joe went—I don't see why I couldn't!"

Romero raised his eyebrows. "Oh, so life is very hard for you, my little *tecolote*? You think things are not fair?"

Antonia's face reddened. "Well, just the same, if I were a boy, like Joe, I'd be lucky. I could ride right alongside of Pops. He'd teach me to rope! He'd let me practice on the calves! He wouldn't say, 'No, you can't have a *riata* to throw, you might get a finger pulled off.'"

She looked down resentfully at her small sun-browned hands, and then went on in a burst of self pity, "I'd get a chance to sleep out on the hills, with the stars right on top of my head! Joe says you can reach up and touch them. He says here on the ranch they're bigger and brighter and closer than anywhere else in the whole world."

Romero shook his head, his eyes wise and kind. "Poor *Tonita mia*! Fighting so hard against the way God made you! Tell me, to be a boy, is that truly so fine a thing? No, no, little one! Be patient. When the right time comes, you will ride every year to the

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roundup with *el patrón*. But now you are only a small one, and rodeos are for men." He sighed and smiled as he looked down at the little, slim, straight-backed girl riding next to him.

"Remember, Tónita, what I once told you? That poor old Romero would have nothing to do all day but sit in the sun and dream the hours away if your legs grew too long—if your eyes too wise? Be kind to me, *amiga*! Do not grow up too fast. Let me ride by your side for a long time to come."

Antonia stared at him. "Why, of course, we'll always ride together. Always and always!"

Romero smiled again, gravely. "Every day, Tonita *mia*, until the last leaf is blown from the tree. But now, we have talked enough, you think? Let us ride fast, *vaquero*. The cattle will top the ridge in another half hour."

He touched Pronto with his spurs and, as the big gray horse shot ahead, Antonia slapped the sorrel on his red rump, and they circled out into a wide loop that would bring them to the rear of the oncoming cattle's down-hill swing. Antonia suddenly pulled up with an excited shout. "There they are!"

Sitting straight and eager in her saddle, she waved her hat wildly as the vanguard of the great lurching, pushing, bellowing herd topped the ridge and wound down the trail in an unending line.

Shading her eyes against the glare, she stared impatiently. Oh, there was Pops! And there was Mr. Sloane, riding his bay colt. What a beauty! Look at it



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dance! When Mr. Sloane got through breaking it, when there was a real bit in its mouth instead of a hackamore around its nose, you would see a fine cow horse, almost as good as any in Pop's string. And look—there was Joe, following along on Whitey.

"Hi, Joe—did you have a good time?" Antonia's excited greeting was lost in the pound of horses' hoofs and the bawling, grunting rush of cattle, as the outfit, yelling and hallooing, herded the cows and calves down the steep trail. Joe grinned through the dust and sweat on his face and waved his hat as he galloped past.

"Hi, Tony! You sure missed it, not comin' along. Oh boy!" Antonia glanced at Romero out of the corner of her eye, and then she shouted to Joe, with her nose in the air, "Camping isn't so much; I'd rather ride with Romero any day!" She dug her heels into Lucky then, and rode forward to meet her father, her yellow head high.

The Boss, unshaven and grimy, his eyes bloodshot from sun and wind and dust, smiled as she loped next to him. "Good work, cowpuncher—you must have started early to catch up with us. I've got a job ready for you. Want to ride along while I bring in those yearling calves up there in that gulch—see, up there to the left, in the brush? They think they're hiding out on us, the little devils! Well, when we get them rounded up, we'll be through for the day. The men won't be sorry, and neither will I. It's been a tough week." He pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket



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and wiped the sweat that stood in beads on his forehead and blinked the dust from his strained tired eyes.

Then, while Antonia stared open mouthed, he gave a quick exclamation, spurred Chavez abruptly, and whirled his horse down the trail at top speed. Oh! Oh! The colt! Bucking wildly, Mr. Sloane's young green horse was lunging through the cattle, scattering them in every direction as he reared and snorted and whirled.

The bellow of four hundred terrified animals, and the din of cowboy yells told the tale. By the time Joe's father got his bay colt gentled down, the herd would be spread from here to China! While she stared horrified, Romero wheeled past her, galloping at top speed, with Joe close behind spurring Whitey.

All along the line, the outfit closed in, shouting, and yelling and prodding. Completely bewildered by the sudden confusion, her heart pounding hard, Antonia hung onto the reins and tried her best to quiet Lucky's excited prancing. What was the best thing to do, when you found yourself alone on a hillside, with outfit and cattle floundering down below you in a choking cloud of dust? One thing was sure—you had sense enough to keep out of the way. Nobody wanted a girl around when four hundred cattle were on the rampage. She would just have to sit and wait until the excitement died down. It would be at least an hour before anyone got around to giving her the slightest thought.

She stared down the trail, coughing away the gritty



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dust that burned her throat and hanging on to the reins as tight as she could. Maybe Lucky wouldn't jump around so much, maybe he wouldn't pull so hard, if he had something interesting to do—if his mind were taken off that milling, bawling mixup down below. What was it her father had said about a little bunch of calves up there on the side hill, in the brush? Why, of course! It would help a lot if she brought them down and headed them toward the holding corral. Poor Pops. He was so tired already that he would be glad to have the job done for him. This was a chance to help.

Reining Lucky toward the brushy gulch that split a deep gash in the hillside, Antonia took the trail that climbed steeply through yellow mustard and tall grass. Far below she could hear the outfit shouting as they rode hard on the heels of the scattered herd and, turning in the saddle, she saw the dim shapes of cattle and horses moving through the brown dust of the river flat.

Now, what would be the first thing to do? How should she go about the business of rounding up those yearling calves? Perhaps she could not manage it all alone, but at least she could try. Without practice, no one could expect to turn into a real *vaquero*. What a golden opportunity!

She let Lucky stop for a breathing spell and began to count the calves that were huddled ahead of her, under the shelter of a scrub oak thicket. Ten of them. They needn't think they could hide. Didn't they know

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that the Boss wanted them at the corrals? And that was where they were going.

She snatched off her hat and waved it wildly as she kicked her heels into the sorrel and sent him along the trail on a run. "Get going, Lucky boy! Yahoo—yipee! Yahoo!" In sturdy imitation of Joe Sloane's cowboy yells, Antonia shouted at the top of her lungs. "Atta boy, Lucky! Chase 'em out of there! Yahoo! Yipee!" The white-faced yearlings fixed astonished eyes on her for a moment, and then turned and broke into a run for the thick brush.

The grass and the mustard stalks had disappeared now, and rough sage and chaparral scratched Antonia's face and arms as she ducked from thicket to thicket, trying to be in ten places at once. The calves thoroughly understood that this business of being a *vaquero* was something quite new to her. Here and there, everywhere, they ran from one brushy cover to another.

No sooner did Lucky have them covered and headed down hill, than they broke away and scattered again in ten separate directions. The little sorrel did his best. Gallantly he worked with all the heart and intelligence of a seasoned cow horse. This way and that he turned, with Antonia half out of the saddle as he whirled to head off a calf. With her yellow hair blowing in streamers, she jammed her sombrero down over her ears and caught her breath grimly.

Grabbing the horn of the saddle, she held on for dear life. Pulling leather was a big help—as long as



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no one was around to see you. Whew—Joe would have to admit that Lucky could turn on a dime! She clenched her blue-jeaned legs against the sorrel's sweating flanks and laughed aloud, half frightened to death, half crazy with glorious excitement.

If she could only hang on long enough, she and Lucky would have those calves just where they wanted them! Pops and the outfit, way, way down below, looked like little black ants. There wasn't time to notice how they were getting along. She had troubles of her own. Things were looking better though—if she could only manage to circle around that pesky scrub oak and keep the calves on the run. Good old Lucky boy. Beautiful, darling, Lucky. There wasn't a horse in the whole world who knew more about working cattle.

At last, one by one, the calves gave up their losing fight for freedom and dropped into line along the trail that led to the holding corrals and the river. Lucky kept close to their heels. The sorrel horse was not taking any chances, and at the first sign of bolting, he was off again at a run, heading them back with a quick turn, or a lightning jump that would throw Antonia out of the saddle onto his neck with squeals of surprise, and small, choked-back gasps of fright.

"It's all right with me, Lucky, whatever you want to do," she giggled meekly, her hands aching from their grip on the reins, her knees rubbed sore as they clamped desperately. "You know lots more about roundups than I do."

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When at last the steep narrow trail lay behind them, and the flat, oak-dotted fields stretched ahead, Antonia, with a tremendous, panting sigh of relief, took off her hat and wiped the perspiration from her forehead. The worst was over. The calves could see the other cattle ahead of them now, and they could smell the river. They would not try to break back to the brushy gulch again. All they wanted was to run to the willows and join the herd that was wallowing and snuffing and bellowing in the cool deep stream.

At the gate of the holding corral, meanwhile, the Boss turned to Romero with an anxious frown. "What do you suppose is keeping Antonia? I lost track of her in all the excitement, but I took for granted she was riding right behind us. I knew she'd have sense enough to keep out of the way. Do you suppose she circled back and rode on home?"

Romero shook his head, his black eyes worried. "She was on the hillside safely, holding Lucky quiet, *señor*, when I looked back the last time to make sure all was well. Because the little sorrel is so gentle, because he has a head full of sense, I was not afraid to leave her alone. But now, if you have no more need of me, *patrón*, Pronto and I will ride back and look for her."

Joe Sloane, perched on top of the fence rail where he had climbed while Whitey had a rest and a drink, broke into the conversation, his blue eyes popping. "Guess you don't have to worry about Tony any longer, boss. Take a look at what's heading across the field, sir! The crazy kid—I'll be doggoned!"



Spurs for Antonia

Almost knocked off the fence by surprise, Joe pointed, his jaw dropping open. By golly! The Boston Bean herself, ridin' herd on ten yearlin' calves, and that little ol' sorrel of hers holdin' 'em in line like a veteran. The darn little cayuse—look at him lope along—and look at that half-pint in the saddle, sittin' there as uppity and cool as all getout! Talk about your old timers! A fella could sure spot the makin's of a real cowhand when he saw one!

Mr. Rawlins, speechless, stared unbelievably at the dusty, hot, disheveled little rider astride her sweat-stained horse, and Romero nudged him, chuckling and beaming, his eyes shining with pride. "*Si, señor*, it is truly our Tonita. You like a little yellow-head *vaquero* on the Aguas Vivas better than a mortgage, eh? I agree, *patrón!*"

Joe, still gawking, scrambled off the fence and untied Whitey from the rails. Hallooing at the top of his lungs, he galloped off across the field to open the lower gate of the holding corral, and Antonia and Lucky drove their calves through to the river bank and watched them lurch over the side into the water.

Antonia took off her hat again and fanned herself breathlessly, the noonday sun beating hotly on her tangled hair and on her dirty face. Her black eyelashes were gray with dust, and her blue cotton shirt was ripped on the right side in a long, brush-torn slit, from shoulder to cuff. From her right eye to her chin a jagged red scratch made a bright path through the dust and perspiration.

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The Boss, spurring Chavez, rode alongside of her and put out his big hand, his eyes warm with approval and pride.

"Shake, cowpuncher! You handled those cattle like a top hand. The 'outfit says you're hired! You've moved right in! But tell me something—whatever made you chase up the canyon after those yearlings, Antonia? What put the idea in your head?"

Antonia, with her grimy small hand in his, looked up at her father with surprised eyes.

"Well," she said simply, "you said you had a job for me. You said you wanted them in the corral, didn't you, Pops?"



8

THE BRANDING

By BILLY WARREN



AT THE BRANDING fire Danny stood around with the rest of the men waiting for the branding irons to get hot. Thompson dragged up a lot of wood on the end of his saddle rope. Then they got the fire going good, with a big back-log and a lot of smaller kindling.

There must have been at least a dozen irons strung along in the fire. Danny knew they needed a lot of them, for there were a great many calves to be branded and the irons had to be kept hot all the time.

Only three cowboys were on their horses. They had herded the cows and calves up about fifty yards from the fire. When they were ready to start with the branding, Jim turned to Danny and gave him the tally book. "This'll be a good job for you, Cowboy," he said.

Danny took the book with confidence. He had already taken a lesson from Monty and he felt he could do the job.

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Monty got on his horse now and prepared to do the roping. He snubbed one end of the thirty-five foot rope to his saddle horn and made a loop in the other end. Then he rode out and tossed the rope around a calf's neck. He turned his horse quickly and came up to the branding fire with the calf bucking and bawling on the end of the rope.

The calf's mother followed along looking pretty scared and mad. But when the men ran out to flank the calf the mother turned back to the herd, and stood there bawling.

Danny was taking in everything. He had an eye on the flankers now. They worked in pairs. One flanker went up to the roped calf and caught it around the neck with one arm. He reached over the animal with the other arm and caught it by the flank. When the calf gave a jump and had all four feet off the ground, the flanker pulled it over and threw it on its side easily. That's what they called flanking, Danny thought. He could see that the trick of the thing was choosing exactly the right instant to make the throw.

After throwing the calf the flanker caught the upper front foot, and held the calf down by placing his knee on its neck. His partner grabbed the calf's upper hind leg and sat down at the rear of the animal. He pushed one foot against the calf's lower hind leg. Then he pulled back on the upper hind leg, and the calf was stretched out ready for the branding iron.

As soon as the animal was down the flanker who had



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thrown the calf released the loop from its neck, and Monty went out for another calf. This was all done so quickly Danny had to watch closely to see it all.

Jim was there with the branding iron as soon as the calf was stretched out. It took only a few seconds to put the *HV* on. Joe Bush had a sharp knife in his hand and did the earmarking.

When they let the calf up, it ran back to its mother, who was still waiting for it at the edge of the herd. The calf didn't seem to be hurt a bit. Danny thought it must be painful when they were putting the brand on. But he wouldn't let himself think of that, for he knew it was necessary for the cattlemen to mark their animals, for identification, and for protection against cattle rustlers.

Danny put down a mark for the *HV* and turned his attention to the calf roper again. Monty had dragged up another calf and two more flankers were tussling with it. They threw it down, and it was quickly branded and turned back to its mother. This went on like clockwork as Danny watched and kept tally.

He didn't have any trouble with the tallying. He just put down a mark for each calf as it was branded, and blocked each five with a cross mark. The way Monty had shown him.

Most of the calves belonged to his dad, but once in a while Monty would drag up a calf that belonged to some other outfit. Then Monty would call out the new brand. Maybe it would be a Diamond Bar or a Cross L. Then Danny would make a mark after

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whichever brand was called. It wasn't a very hard job and gave him time to watch all the activities.

He was particularly interested in the way Monty did the roping; it seemed he never missed a throw. He would catch the calf right around the neck with the loop every time. Sometimes the calf was a big one and the flanker would have a hard time getting it down.

But Swede was a different story! Once he got hold of an especially big calf, and when he tried to flank it the Swede's big feet got tangled up. He fell down and pulled the calf down on top of him. Tex caught the calf by the hind legs, which were sticking up in the air, and held the calf down, on top of Swede.

Swede finally wriggled out from under the animal. He grinned when he got up and said, "I guess after this I just let the calf do the flanking."

When they were about half way through the branding Tex asked Danny if he didn't want to try his hand at flanking. Danny was beginning to feel pretty sure of himself by now. He had been watching just how the flankers went about it and felt pretty sure he could do the trick. He saw Monty coming in with a medium-sized calf.

Danny handed the tally book to Tex and said, "I'll tackle this one."

He caught the taut rope just behind Monty's horse and walked toward the calf, letting the rope slide through his hand. The closer he got to the calf the bigger it looked. But it was too late to turn back now, for he knew the cowhands would laugh at him if he did.



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When he got to the calf it was standing stiff-legged, pulling back on the rope. Danny leaned over the calf to catch it by the flank. Then, suddenly, the calf gave a wild leap and sprang high in the air like a bucking bronco.

Danny was balanced half way over its back and went up in the air, too. The calf made another jump. This time when it came down Danny had somehow managed to get astraddle of it. Then the calf started bucking in a circle, with Danny bouncing up and down on its back. He wanted to jump off, but couldn't see a good place to land.

Everybody was laughing and hollering, "Ride 'im, Cowboy! Ride 'im, Cowboy! Stick with 'im, Danny!"

Finally the calf came to the end of his rope and was jerked around suddenly. Danny went sailing through the air and came down all sprawled out.

Then before he could get up Tex came running over and grabbed him and yelled, "Bring the *HV*."

Joe Bush ran out with a branding iron, and they pretended they thought Danny was a calf. They just scorched his leather chaps a little bit. When Danny got up he dusted himself off and laughed with the rest of the men.

Jim said, "Now, Cowboy, you're not a maverick any more. You've got the *HV* brand on you."

Danny said, "That's right, Mr. Hollister. You can't get rid of me now."

Then Monty dragged up a smaller calf and Danny went after it, this time with more determination. He

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didn't have much trouble getting the calf down, but he had made one mistake. He had thrown the calf with its left side up.

Monty called out, "Danny's going to start a new brand for the *HV*."

Then Danny remembered that his dad's brand went on the right side. He let the calf up and flanked it again with the right side up. He helped hold it down until it was branded and ear-marked.

Danny was glad to take the tally book again and he kept tally until they were through. He had done all the flanking he cared to for the first day.



WORKADAY COWBOY

By KERRY WOOD



RANDY reached Grassy Lake the morning of the rodeo, saddle weary after a four-day-and-night ride. He tied Banjo to the gaudily painted tie-rail put up for the occasion on the front street, then walked stiffly into the rodeo office to register in as many events as he could afford. Entry fees cost money, and Randy's poke was flat. But he took heart from the appearance of the ponies tethered along the street. They were workaday horses, and it was likely that their riders were regular cowboys and the competition wouldn't be too steep.

"Randy Ganns?" repeated the rodeo boss, filling out the cards after he'd looked over the slim stranger with the pallid face. "You a well-known rider?"

"Nope," the boy grinned. "This is my first year on the circuit."

And likely his last, he felt like adding. Bad luck had tagged him, right from the start. He drew good horses, but his rides won very little money. Then he'd



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got trampled by a mean steer, losing a month in a hospital out of the short rodeo season. For one reason and another the cash prizes so enticingly advertised on the stampede posters hadn't come his way.

"Any big names here?" he asked.

"One," the rodeo boss spoke with pride. "We got Pay Logan booked for all the ride events. Pay happened to be visitin' friend o' his on a ranch near here, so we coaxed him to enter our show. There's one other man, Frew McKay, who's won a batch of prizes this year on the secondary shows, but all the rest o' the contestants are local boys."

Randy nodded, pretending indifference. But he knew that his chances of winning much of the prize money had been sharply reduced by this news. Pay Logan was a top performer, experienced and colorful. Frew McKay was also a good man, not so spectacular as Pay but a steady winner. Likely there would be a local rider or two who would qualify for some of the cash, so Randy's chances were slimming down. And this end-of-the-season rodeo was his last chance to earn a winter stake.

He spent seventy-five cents at the local Chinaman's for a meal, his first decent feed in a couple of days. Then he rode Banjo down to the rodeo grounds, which were gay with streamers and banners and already crowded with spectators from all over the district. He tied his horse in a handy spot and strolled across to the corrals to look over the stock and meet some of the boys.



Workaday Cowboy

Pay Logan was in the midst of a crowd, narrating some of his experiences at the big shows. A good man, Pay.

Frew McKay was there, too. Randy had met him once before, and was pleased when Frew remembered him. Frew named off the boys to him, regular range riders like Val Roche, Windy Smith, Pete Malone, and others. Pay Logan shook hands, too.

"Here's another guy you'll want to meet," Frew said, indicating a tall and grizzled man who was lounging sideways in a saddle cinched on a big bay. "This is Jim Byers, who's acting as a safety rider today."

"Hi, boy," said Jim, reaching down a large hand. "I see you're still favorin' that sore leg o' yours. I was in the stands at the rodeo when it happened. You sure tangled with a wicked beef, eh?"

"That steer looked bigger'n a house, from underneath," Randy said, and the older man chuckled.

"Saw you ride a bronc that day, too," Jim continued. "Wasn't it that wild Bearcat you drew?"

"That's right."

"You rode him to the whistle, if I remember right?"

"Yeah."

"But you didn't get any money for the ride, did you?"

"No—I placed fourth."

Frew McKay had drifted back to the crowd around Pay Logan, leaving Jim Byers and young Randy to-

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gether. Jim spat out a chew and glanced shrewdly at the slim young cowboy who looked so ill.

"Why'd you go in for this rodeo stuff, kid?"

"Oh, I thought I'd like the life."

"Raised on a ranch, were you?"

"On a farm-sized ranch. My Dad checked out a year back, leaving me foot-loose. So I thought I'd try for some of this rodeo money."

"Earnin' a stake to buy more whiteface cattle for your ranch, eh?"

"Nope. The bank took the ranch—Dad was sick for a longish spell, y'see. I follow the rodeos just to make a little winter stake."

But he hadn't made it, he added to himself.

Byers nodded, and opened his mouth to say something. Then he hesitated.

"Any good horses here?" Randy asked, staring at the sleepy herd in the corral.

"Mostly local plugs," Jim answered. "We had to give Pay Logan the pick o' the lot. It's only fair—he's a big name, so he wants to make a decent show here at this two-bit rodeo. Anyway, he'll likely cop most o' the money."

"Yeah."

"Well, there's the announcer. The show's gonna start. Good luck, kid."

The cowboys gathered around the rodeo boss, drawing numbers from his hat. Randy pulled the Two number, with Pay Logan Four and Frew McKay Five. There were only ten riders for the bronc events,



Workaday Cowboy

and only three shutes fronting the small corrals. Pay had reserved the one guaranteed buckner, a horse named Firecracker.

"Ladeeees an' Gent-ul-mennn. We're gonna get things goin' now, and we'll start off by callin' your attention to Number One Shute. The cowboy up is Windy Smith, ridin' a bronc called Ski-jump. Let 'er go, boys!"

Windy's horse trotted out of the shute like a farm nag looking for a plough. Windy fanned with his hat and raked with his heels, but Ski-jump just wasn't a buckner. He had been saddle-broken once before, and saw no need to get excited just because a couple thousand people were watching and a batch of banners were blowing in the breeze. When the whistle blew to announce the end of the riding time, Windy disgustedly swung off the horse and Ski-jump obligingly permitted himself to be herded over to the holding corral. A few hand-clappings sounded, but some folks booed and Windy got red.

"Sorry, folks," said the announcer. "We must 'a' pulled a boner, puttin' that milk-horse in among the buckners. Don't blame Windy; he was ready to ride a cyclone. But I think we got a good ride comin' up, folks. The horse looks like a killer. Watch Number Two Shute. The cowboy is Randy Ganns, on a horse named Monty."

Monty was a rangy black with rolling, wild eyes. Randy eased down into the saddle and felt the horse quiver as his weight came on it. The shute gate jerked



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open, with Monty making a flying leap into the ring. Then the horse's head went down, its back arched, and all four feet crashed earthwards with a jolt that shook every bone in the boy's body. The bronc didn't waste any time at running; he stayed on a twenty-foot area and buck-jumped and jolted around and around in a vicious spine-hurting circle that made Randy grateful for the whistle. Jim Byers swung his bay close, so Randy jumped clear of Monty and clung to Jim until he got his balance.

"Rough ride, eh?"

"Whewww!"

"You stuck with him, though. How many times you been thrown this summer, kid?"

"Twice."

"How many rides?"

"About twenty."

Jim nodded, then asked how often Randy had copped prize money. The boy mentioned his four third-place wins, whereupon the big man nodded his head as if agreeing with something he had said to himself. Randy jumped off the safety rider's horse and Jim rode over to the Three Shute. The crowd was still cheering the boy's ride, but not with the full-throated approval it reserved for top performers.

The third rider drew a running horse who raced across the enclosure and tried to jump the encircling wires. It wasn't much of a ride to watch, so the crowd didn't respond very well. Then the announcer warmed them up with the news that the famous Pay Logan



Workaday Cowboy

was going to come out of Number One Shute on a bad horse called Firecracker. A spontaneous cheer rose from the crowd even before the gate opened.

Firecracker bounced out and started a kicking performance. Pay Logan's hat was in his hand, fanning the horse wildly while the man rocked with every jump. His heels raked from neck to belly, and he seemed to teeter as though on a violent rocking chair. Firecracker kicked up his heels, grunting. He wasn't a hard buckner, but Logan seemed to be tossed all over the saddle and the ride looked exceedingly tough. When the whistle blew, the crowd went wild.

"See how it's done?" asked Jim Byers' quiet voice, beside Randy.

"Eh? Oh, sure!"

Byers glanced at him, about to say more, then changed his mind and rode over to the second shute. Frew McKay gave the crowd a brisk show, his horse being a rearing sort that threatened to go over backwards. The crowd cheered lustily. Frew was their local champion. The rest of the rides were routine affairs, the men falling off any of the horses that showed spirit.

Pay Logan took top money, with Frew second, and Randy third.

"Who had the worst horse?" asked Byers, as the announcer told the details about the calf-roping event that was to be next on the program.

"Well . . ."

"You did, Randy," said Jim. "Ask Frew, ask Pay

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Logan. We all know it. But you didn't make your ride look hard enough—you just rode the bronc and let it go at that."

"Now look ~~here~~ . . ."

"Take it easy, kid. Are you in this ropin' show?"

Pay Logan's horse was a flashy palomino, fitted with a silver-studded black saddle and bridle to match. Pay himself was fancily dressed in the western movie fashion, presenting a vivid contrast to the rangeland cowboys in their faded shirts and worn jeans. The crowd cheered Pay roundly, though his time on the calf roping wasn't very good. Frew McKay was the fast man on that job. Randy dropped his calf to earth with an easy roll that didn't jolt the animal, but he placed fourth.

"You don't treat 'em rough 'enough," Frew said, when Randy came in. "Slap 'em down fast—the crowd loves it."

Randy nodded, but said nothing. And Jim Byers looked at him with that shrewd glance.

"You go it the way you learned on your ranch, eh?"

"It's the only way I know."

"Uh-huh. Good cattle-punchin', too," Jim said. "But it isn't rodeo stuff, like Frew says."

The steer riding was next, with Pay Logan again the spectacular performer on top of a brindle beef that bawled like a stuck pig. Frew McKay pivoted wildly on his jumpy animal, just managing to stick the time limit required. Randy got a hefty brute that kept wagging its head and side-jumping. Then the animal



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tried to charge the boy when the time whistle permitted him to jump off. Jim Byers cut in and saved Randy.

"The steers don't seem to like me," he commented.

"You stuck to him like a burr," said Jim. "I bet you get money for that ride."

But it was only the third place, once again.

The wild-pony ride, a three-man team needed to hold and saddle the bronc, was a split-purse affair. Windy Smith and Pete Malone asked Randy to team with them, Randy to do the riding. They drew a long-legged colt that did a lot of rearing, but the husky cowboys skidded their heels into the turf and finally dragged the horse to a stop, snubbing him while Randy threw on the saddle and cinched it. Next second he swung aboard, the boys let loose the holding rope, and Randy bucked the pony to a stop.

"First place to Randy Ganns' crew," yelled the announcer.

"Nice going!" commented Pay Logan, who'd stayed out of that event. Frew McKay's team was second. Only two prizes were offered, and the other two teams had failed to get their saddles on and riders up within the time limit set.

Windy Smith and Pete were boisterously pleased over their victory. They kept clapping Randy on the back and praising his ride.

Pay Logan took the steer decorating event, with Frew second and a local boy, Mel Connors, winning third place. Randy was fourth—out of the money.



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"Wild cow milking event," yelled the announcer. "A three-man job, folks. The cow is turned loose, the team rides after it, lassoes it, then has to hold it still while a pop bottle is filled with milk. If there's any hungry babies in the crowd, give us a shout!"

Windy and Pete asked Randy to team with them again, with Windy to do the milking. It was Randy's rope that first settled over the cow's head, and Banjo reared back and stopped the rampaging cow while Randy snubbed the lasso. Pete managed to bring his horse close enough to wedge in the cow between them, then Windy went into action with one hand and the bottle. The cow did a lot of kicking, so Windy's milking time suffered badly and the Frew McKay team took first money.

"Oh, well—we won second place," said Pete, and he and Windy slapped Randy on the back again.

"Nice going!" said Jim Byers, the next time he got close to Randy. "You were the first to get a rope on the cow in that event—you beat Frew McKay's time by a full thirty seconds on that throw."

"Just luck," said Randy.

Jim glanced at him, then dropped his voice: "You look kind 'a' peaked, kid—you feelin' sick?"

"I'm fine." Randy became irritated. "Say—you tryin' to nurse-maid me, or somethin'?"

Jim grinned and rode off to the Number One Shute. The finals of the bronc busting were due, the last item on the Grassy Lake program. The announcer changed Firecracker's name to Snowball, hoping that the





Banjo reared back and stopped the rampaging cow.

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crowd wouldn't get wise to the fact that Pay Logan was again riding the same bronc. Pay put on the same kind of show as before, a wildly rocking, heel raking, hat flapping ride that had the folks on their feet yelling at the top of their lungs. Frew McKay drew a slow horse, but the crowd cheered him anyway. Windy Smith came out on Monty and went head over heels within three seconds to leave the horse the victor in that contest. Randy got a rearing bronc this time, and grimly sat his saddle and stayed the full time.

"You got the wild ride again," Jim Byers said. "But I bet Pay Logan gets the top money."

"Yeah," Randy agreed, panting.

"You know why?"

"Huh?"

"You know why he'll get the money that you should have?"

Randy looked at the grizzled rider. "All right—you tell me."

"Because Pay is an actor," Byers said. "He and Frew McKay make it look hard, and the crowd thinks they're wonderful riders even when they're on slow horses."

Randy stared at him.

"You mean, all that hat flapping and rockin' helps make 'em look good?"

"That's it. You ride the regular way, like you would while workin' on your home ranch. It isn't showy, so you don't win the top money even when you turn in the best rides o' this rodeo. Go ask Frew, if you don't believe me."



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Randy shook his head, grinning a little. The announcer told the crowd that Pay Logan had taken top honors as the best all-round rider of the stampede, with Frew McKay placing second!

"You're a workaday cowboy," Jim Byers said. "Like I say, you do things the way a guy does 'em on a ranch. Why don't you forget this foo-faw rodeo stuff an' go back to ranchin'?"

"Why don't you mind your own business?" Randy retorted.

"That's what I'm doing," smiled the big man. "I'm offerin' you a ranch job, kid. I need a good rider, an' that's why I've been watchin' you so close. But I want a workin' model, mind, an' not a side-show cowboy. If you chuck up your rodeo ambitions, I'll take you on. Windy Smith and Pete Malone both work for me on my Circle-Bar spread, and they'd welcome you as a buddy. How about it?"

Randy Ganns said:

"You jist saw the last of a rodeo cowboy. Circle-Bar, here I come!"

THE HORSE DRIVE

By CHARLES M. MARTIN



UNCLE FRANK looked down the long tables in the big dining-room, and a smile of pleasure spread across his rugged tanned face. Forty-one boys by actual tally were refreshing the inner man, and as Uncle Frank remarked to Segundo, "Not a sick or pindlin' critter in the herd."

Randy had learned the ropes in the ten days he had spent on the Hi-Ho Rancho. Randy now rode with the hands, entered into their rough banter and play with smiling good humor, and had confided to Toughie Slade that he had gained four pounds.

Uncle Frank talked quietly to Segundo. The Ramrod never gave his orders to the hands; he told his Segundo what was wanted, and Segundo issued the day orders. The boys knew that something unusual was in the wind, and after breakfast they crowded around Segundo, who waited at the tie-rail over in the barnlot.



The Horse Drive

"Gather round, cowhands," Segundo announced. "We aim to make a drive this morning. Like you know, the colts are running with the she-stuff down in the river pasture."

"He means with the mares," Husky Bronson whispered to Randy. "You ever been on a drive?"

"No, but I'll learn," Randy whispered eagerly, and turned to listen to Segundo.

"I want the tophands to take the key positions," Segundo announced. "Bull Benson will ride at right point Husky Bronson and Duke Ransom at left point. Lucky Taylor and Fatso Blake at right swing, with Toughie and Randy at left swing. Freckles will ride with the hands to bring up the drag. We will corral the bunch down there in the east pasture and then cut out the colts. The Ramrod wants us to gentle the young stuff, and I don't want a lot of you pilgrims to stampede the cavvy once we get them gathered and moving down this away."

"Gee," Randy murmured to Toughie Slade. "What's he mean?"

"You ride with me and I'll tell you," Toughie answered. "First we've got to gear our tops, and the tophands will have catch-ropes."

Randy had long since learned that gearing your tops meant saddling your best horse. He led Hollywood to the rail and saddled him expertly after brushing the white horse until the sleek coat glistened in the early sun. Toughie was talking in low tones as the two checked over every bit of their gear.



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"The point riders ride up front to point the lead," he explained. "They keep the lead horses traveling in the right direction. The swing men are back about halfway, and there will be plenty of hands in between to hold the horse band. The drag riders bring up the rear, and it is their job to keep all the strays and stragglers with the bunch. They get all the dust, and the little kids can't do any harm back there."

"Boots and saddles, men," Segundo called as he mounted the bay stallion Butch. "We'll ride up to the far end and bunch the cavvy, and I don't want any horse play. Let's get to moving, and *walk* those broncs for the first quarter of a mile."

Randy and Toughie rode side by side behind Husky Bronson and Dude Ransom. Dude was the only hand who had his boots polished, and he wore a clean gabardine shirt. It had been a full week since anyone had referred to Randy as a pilgrim, and Randy felt and acted like an old-timer.

When they were well away from the ranch buildings Segundo lifted his horse into a lope. Randy looked back over the group of riders, who wore shirts of all colors. Even the buttons were loping along, many of them riding bareback.

"You know, Toughie," Randy confided to his saddle mate, "there isn't a panty-waist in the bunch. Some of these brats were cry-babies when they came here, but now you never hear a whimper out of them, even when they get spilled from a bronc."

"Look at Tiny Tim on Power House," Toughie



The Horse Drive

said with a chuckle. "There's a salty button for you. Little old Power House don't weigh no more than two hundred and fifty pounds, but he thinks he is just as big as Butch who weighs eleven hundred."

"All right, men," Segundo called back. "You point and swing men ride right and left now and split these other riders in half. We'll begin at that far end and start to drive the saddle stock down. Keep 'em movin', but don't get 'em runnin' too fast. I left six men at the holdin' corrals, and you hands know what to do—fan out and work the brush clean."

"That means he wants every hoss brought down," Toughie told Randy. "Hey, you buttons, half of you ride over here behind Randy and me. You, Tiny Tim, keep that bronc of yore's under control, and tell those little dudes what to do."

"Okay, tophand," Tiny Tim answered importantly, and turned to six boys all larger than himself. "You, Fresno," he bawled at an eight-year-old, "ride next to me, and Limey next to you. The rest of you dudes watch us, and don't go chousing off on your own."

"Aw nuts," Fresno jeered.

Tiny Tim whirled Power House and rode directly at the larger boy. Fresno stood his ground, and Tiny Tim whirled a small lasso and whacked Fresno across the shoulders.

"You want to step about fast and talk easy when I give you a day order," Tiny Tim shouted.

"Okay, okay, big shorty," Fresno yelled hastily. "Like you said, Tim."



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"That goes for the rest of you pilgrims," Tiny Tim told the other boys in his group. "Let's get on up there and start to working this draw."

Randy turned his face away, trying to control his laughter. Tiny Tim wasn't fooling, and Toughie confided to Randy that Tim could whip any boy in his group. "He's a salty hairpin," Toughie said between chuckles. "And he won't be seven until school opens."

Now they were in the brush at the far end of the big pasture, and Toughie rode after a big mare and a yearling colt. Randy nudged Hollywood with a heel and started after a dun mare with a claybank colt at her side. Tiny Tim was working the low trees on Power House.

Randy brought out his mare and colt and started them down the sloping hill. Toughie was waiting, and he pointed out another pair of mares off to the side. Randy was perspiring but happy, and they worked for an hour before they joined Husky Bronson and Dude Ransom.

"You buttons stay back there and keep that stuff moving down," Toughie told the youngsters. "Don't let any of those old hay-burners break back into the brush."

"Or I'll make you hard to catch," Tiny Tim put in his bit, and then he glared at Fresno.

"I didn't say nuthin'," Fresno protested.

"You was thinkin' sumpin'," Tiny Tim barked.

"And I don't want none of yore slack-jaw!"

Randy grinned and rode away with the tophands to



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search for more grazing horses. Half an hour later he and Toughie rode down the hill where a hundred mares and colts were gathered in a bunch. Segundo called for the key men to take their places, and Toughie rode with Randy to his place at left swing.

The smaller boys were fanned out, and Segundo rode among them, telling them to narrow their circle and to move up forward. Then he rode up ahead to right point, and the drive started down the valley to the holding corrals.

Randy felt important, as though he were really doing some worth-while work. Hollywood was fast, and Randy was busy keeping some of the young mares from bolting away from the bunch. The other tophands were riding like old-timers, and the little fellows darted in and out to keep the colts with the bunch.

Randy was dripping with sweat when they came in sight of the holding corrals. Some riders were guarding the open gates as others herded the horses into the corrals. When the last stray was finally in, Uncle Frank rode over to give a word of praise.

"Never saw a bunch of tophands work a remuda over any better," he told the eager riders. "We'll leave them here until after dinner, and then we'll cut out the young stuff. Now you hands better light a shuck for headquarters and get a shower if you feel sticky."

"Who wants a shower?" Toughie said, looking at Randy's perspiring face. "We'll get just as sweaty this afternoon."

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"I'll tell a man," Randy agreed. "I'll race you back to the barns!"

He was off like the wind with Toughie in close pursuit, and the whole crowd rattled down the dirt road in a swirling cloud of dust. A quarter of a mile from the barns Randy reined in his horse. He hadn't forgotten that a hand was supposed to walk his horse in to cool it down.

Segundo rode alongside Randy on Butch, and he grinned at him. "You like being a cowhand, feller?" he asked.

"By dogies," Randy answered enthusiastically. "Look what I've been missing all my life!"

"Too bad you will be leaving in just four more days," Segundo remarked casually.

Randy's face clouded, and he sucked on his lower lip. "I'm going to talk to Uncle Frank," he murmured. "I want to stay on here."

"But you said you'd stay two weeks, and reservations have been pourin' in," Segundo said slowly. "Your place is done spoke for."

"I won't go," Randy answered doggedly. "I'll even help with the feeding if Uncle Frank will just let me stay on."

"Well, he's the boss," Segundo said with a shrug.

"Look, Segundo," Randy pleaded. "You've got a drag with the Ramrod. If you'd speak to Uncle Frank, I'm sure he would let me be a hand."

"You mean—work for your keep?" Segundo whispered hoarsely.



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"I'll do anything to stay," Randy argued desperately. "Or, else I will have to go up in the mountains to an old dude hunting lodge, and those pilgrims don't speak our language."

"My aching back," Segundo muttered, and then he grinned at Randy. "Gee, you smell like a horse," he said and wrinkled up his nose.

"I like to smell like a horse," Randy said emphatically. "It's the cleanest smell I know, like fresh hay, and—and manure."

"Feller, you've come a long way," Segundo praised heartily. "I'll speak to the Ramrod and see what I can do."

They were at the barns now, and Segundo rode directly to Uncle Frank. He talked quietly for a moment and Randy saw Uncle Frank shake his head a time or two. Randy's heart sank, and then Segundo began to talk earnestly. Finally Uncle Frank nodded and walked toward the house. Randy rode over to Segundo, slid down, and started to strip his riding gear.

"What did the Ramrod say?" he asked Segundo anxiously.

"Said he had more than seventy applications," Segundo answered. "Said he kinda cottoned to you, and finally he agreed to let you stay on when I told him you were a big help to me with the little buttons."

"Gee, that was swell of you, Segundo," Randy murmured, and once more the smile returned to his face. "I want to make a tophand before beef round-up."

"Look, chum," Segundo said seriously. "You've got



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a way with horses, and you can help me break out some of those two-year-olds. By the time the buttons get to crawling all over 'em for a week or two, they get tame as dogs. You like?"

"Gee," Randy sighed. "Do I? Boss, you've signed up a bronc-stomper from way back."

"Nuts," Segundo said inelegantly. "Some of those knotheads really turn on when you go to top 'em off the first time or two. I've been throwed so hard I bounced. You think you can cut the buck?"

"Who me?" Randy drawled.

"Not yore old man," Segundo grunted. "Help me strip those broncs the buttons were riding, on account of it ain't long until grub pile."

Randy finished brushing Hollywood and began to unsaddle the other horses. Perspiration ran down into his eyes, but he told himself that *this* was really living. He hurried to the washroom when the triangle rang the summons for dinner, unmindful of the sweaty shirt which clung to his muscular torso.

There was little talking during the meal, and Randy filled his plate twice. When the meal was over, he slipped up behind Aunt Mary and hugged her. "Gee, Aunt Mary, you're a swell cook," he whispered in her ear, and then he kissed her cheek.

Aunt Mary smiled with happiness. "You and your apple sauce," she chided gently. "But I like it, Randy boy."

"Uh huh, smooching the cooky," a deep voice said, and Randy flushed as he turned and saw Uncle Frank



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watching him with smiling gray eyes. "No fooling, feller," Uncle Frank continued, "I'm mighty glad you're going to stay on with us. I've been watching you, and you've got the makings of a top hand, if you just stay with it."

"Mebbe you'll get homesick," Aunt Mary suggested.

Randy frowned and then smiled slowly. "I won't get homesick," he said quietly. "You see, Dad and Mother are both very busy, and I don't see much of them. I like it much better here."

"You have no sisters or brothers?" Aunt Mary asked.

Randy shook his head slowly. "There's just me and—and eight servants," he answered.

"And he wants to help Segundo with the chores," Uncle Frank told Aunt Mary.

"I'll tell a man," Randy said soberly. "I certn'y will!"

Uncle Frank cleared his throat. "Somebody ought to tell 'em," he growled, and Aunt Mary shook her head and frowned. "I mean, you better get out there and tell the buttons they can't go down to cut out the colts from the mares," Uncle Frank told Randy.

Randy nodded and went out into the yard. Only the bigger boys were saddling fresh horses, and Segundo told Randy to gear a horse named Big John. Bull Benson was saddling Kyak, and Dude Ransom was already mounted on a black by the name of High Johnny.

Segundo called Tiny Tim and talked gravely to the

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little fellow. He told Tiny to have the gates open, and to have some of the smaller boys block off the road when the hands came up with the colts. Tiny Tim nodded and started importantly to instruct his helpers.

"Listen to him tell it scary," Bull Benson whispered to Randy. "All wool and a yard long, that button."

"A yard wide," Dude Ransom corrected.

"Three feet square," Bull retorted in his deep voice, and then Segundo shouted the old call of boots and saddles.

The tophands and the just ordinary hands mounted their horses and rode down the valley, leaving the buttons and the pilgrims to wait at the home corrals. Segundo rode up to the holding corrals and dismounted. He climbed the rails to man a gate while Bull Benson and Husky Bronson drove the mares on through.

As a mare passed through, Segundo would close the gate quickly from his perch on the top-rail. Dude Ransom would then drive the colt into another corral. Randy watched the gate device with interest. He told himself that there was a lot to learn on a stock ranch, and his face glowed with pride and pleasure when Segundo called to him to come over and learn how to work the separator.

It required two hours to cull out the colts, and then the tophands mounted their horses and started the drive to the home corrals. The buttons working with Tiny Tim formed a line to block the road as the colt band came on at a run.



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When the last colt was safely penned, Segundo wiped the sweat from his face and grinned at Randy. "You like?" he asked.

"Gee, this is super," Randy said happily.

"Let's hit the showers now," Segundo suggested. "I don't mind gettin' up a good sweat, but there ain't any real excuse for a feller to go around smellin' like a hoss when the day's work is done. I'll soap your back, and you soap mine."

"It's a deal," Randy agreed, and they started to the showers with the tophands making it a race.

Randy stood under the shower with the cold water drenching him. The tophands winked at each other when Randy began to sing at the top of his voice, "Gimme a horse, a grezz big horse, an' gimme a buckaroo . . ."


"Pipe down!" Bull Benson growled in his deepest voice. "You want to wake up Danny after Aunt Mary just got him to sleep?"

Randy grinned and reached for a towel. He had never felt so alive in all his life, and he wondered what old R.W. would say when he told him that he wanted to stay on and be a tophand.

11

THE ROUND UP

By KATE SEREDY

 "I HAVE a surprise for all of you," Father said. "I met the judge yesterday, and he told me that the big county fair will be held near our village this year—one week from today."

"Oh! And can we all go?" asked Jancsi eagerly.

"Of course we will go, but I have to get some horses for the animal show. I'm riding out to the herds across the river to round up about twenty. I want to sell some at the fair. Jancsi, you're coming with me. And if Kate wants to leave her garden for a day, she may come along."

Kate looked at Mother. "Will the baby flowers be safe if I leave them?" she asked.

"Don't you worry, child, I'll take good care of them," said Mother, smiling.

They rode out of the yard while the morning dew was still sparkling on the grass. The north road they took today wasn't at all like the one leading to the

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sheep herds. There were large wheat and rye fields on both sides. Narrow paths forked out of the main road, leading to white cottages nestling under shade trees. From the distance they looked like small white mushrooms under their heavy thatched roofs. The scenery was changing gradually. There were more and more trees. They crossed many small wooden bridges, spanning brooks. Soon they could see the river Tisza, like a wide blue ribbon on the green velvet of the fields. Jancsi rode ahead. Suddenly he waved and cried: "The 'Komp' is in. Hurry, Father, they're waiting for us." They spurred their horses and clattered on to the floating ferry, the Komp. It was attached to stout ropes on both sides. The ropes stretched across the river and were wound on large wooden pulleys. There were several wagons and riders on the wide platform of the Komp.

Kate, following the example of Father and Jancsi, got off her horse and tied him to a hitching-post. "How will we get across? Row?" she asked.

"Watch these men, Kate. They'll pull the Komp across by the ropes. We can help, too," said Jancsi. A bell sounded. Another answered from across the river. Everybody walked to the ropes. "Here, Kate. Grab this rope! Pull when they say 'Hooo-ruck!'"

"Hooo-ruck!" Kate pulled for all she was worth. "Hooo-ruck!" they cried with every pull. The Komp began to move. "Hooo-ruck! Hooo-ruck!" chanted everybody, pulling and slacking. The far bank seemed to come nearer and nearer. They could see other



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wagons and riders waiting. There was a scraping sound when the Komp touched bottom and came to a stop. A man on the bank fastened it to a high post.

"Coming back tonight, Mister Nagy?" he asked Father when they rode past him.

"Yes, Géza, we'll bring about twenty horses. Wait for us."

The road led through a small forest of acacia trees. Their branches were heavy with clusters of white flowers. The air was drenched with their sweet, heady perfume. White petals drifted in the breeze, covering the ground like snow.

As soon as they left the forest, they saw the first corrals. They were huge, grassy squares, surrounded by tall fences. Long, low stables and a few white cottages were scattered among them. Corrals and buildings formed an immense triangle. In the distance hundreds of horses were grazing placidly. Here and there a horse herder sat his horse, motionless as a statue against the blue sky. One of them saw Father and rode to him. He was an old man, but straight-shouldered and strong, with snow-white hair and a clearly modeled, sun-burned face. Under bushy white eye-brows his black eyes were sharp as an eagle's.

"Welcome, Mister Nagy. We got your message. The boys are ready for the round up." He looked at Kate and Jancsi. "The young ones could stay with my wife, out of harm's way."

Father shook his head. "Jancsi is working with us this year; he is old enough to know what it's all about."



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But—Kate, I think you'd better stay with Árpád's wife."

"Oh, Uncle Márton, please let me go too. Please!" cried Kate.

Father looked at the old herder. Árpád shook his head. "If those horses stampede, 'Mister Nagy, you know what it means! A round up is no place for a girl child."

"She isn't a girl child. She's almost as good as a boy," said Jancsi stoutly. "Father, let Kate ride with me. I can take care of her."

Father hesitated for a second. Then he said: "Kate, you kept your word to me once. Will you promise me now to keep close to Jancsi, and not to scream or yell no matter what happens?" He was very serious. "If these wild horses hear one of your famous screams, they'll run right off the face of the earth."

"I promise!" said Kate, looking straight into his eyes.

"Very well, you may go with Jancsi. Árpád! You take two men and start the drive from the north. Send four men to me. Two will go with Jancsi and Kate and drive from the east. I'll take two men to the west."

Even Árpád's straight back expressed his disapproval as he rode away. They saw him stop and speak to the men.

"Jancsi." Father's voice rang sharp—he was giving orders now. "You are one of the men today. Do you know what to do?"

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"Yes, Father. I ride slowly to the east fields, about two miles from here. When I pass the last herds, I turn and start the drive back to the corrals. If they stampede, I ride with them and try to take the lead to turn the herd."

"If they stampede, you take Kate out of the way and let the herders turn them. Understand?"

Then Father gave his orders to the waiting herders, and they rode off.

Kate and Jancsi followed the two young herders in silence. They rode slowly, keeping well away from the grazing horses. Kate watched the men. She wondered if they ever got off their horses or were grown to them. Straight, yet supple, their bodies followed the swinging movement of the horses in perfect, smooth rhythm.

Jancsi touched her arm and whispered: "You won't scream, Kate? Promise?" He looked worried.

"I won't make a sound, no matter what happens. Thank you for sticking up for me."

A tall split-rail fence showed in the distance. "Here's where we spread out," said one of the herders.

Kate was terribly excited. They were riding along the fence now, about fifty feet from each other. "Stampede, stampede," kept ringing in her ears. What if they stampede? But everything went well. They turned back toward the corrals. At their approach there was a ripple of movement in the herd. They stopped grazing, neighed uneasily, but weren't frightened. Slowly they began to move in the direction of

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the corrals. Jancsi and Kate were directly behind them, the herders slightly to the sides.

Jancsi took off his hat and wiped his forehead. His first round up was going off well and he felt very proud. The herd was moving peacefully—surely there wouldn't be any trouble. But—what was the sudden stir in front there? He stood up in the stirrups, saw a flock of partridges fly up, heard the sharp, frightening neighing of the leaders, saw the whole herd sway and swerve . . .

"They're turning! Get out of the way, Kate! Follow me!" he yelled. It was too late. The frightened herd was thundering down on them. He couldn't stop to help Kate. His own horse was caught in the panic and raced at break-neck speed. Looking around he saw Milky go like a white flash in the other direction, with Kate bent close to his neck. He yelled: "To the left Kate!" It was useless. He could hardly hear his own voice in the deafening tumult. His own words flashed in his memory: "If they stampede, I take the lead to turn the herd!"

With a desperate struggle he pulled at the reins, his horse swerved to the right. The herd followed! "Now back to the corrals, if I can only keep ahead of them! Come on, Bársony!" He dug his heels into the horse's sides. Almost flying over the pasture, he turned his head to look for Milky. Why, the herd must have split in half! There was Kate to his far right, racing ahead of more horses than he had behind him! She was leading them to the corrals!



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"What girl!" shouted Jancsi. "Hurray!"

He was almost at the first corral gate. He checked his horse, pulling him sharply to one side. The wild horses thundered past him and raced around into the inclosure. He closed the gate quickly, just as the rest of the herd rushed into the adjoining corral. Milky, shivering and snorting, pressed close to Bársony. Kate grinned at Jancsi as she closed the gates. "Look at the herders," she said with a wink; "we beat them to it."

The two men looked rather sheepish and bewildered. There was no time for conversation, though. Father's herd came in, closely followed by old Árpád from the north. When all the horses were safely closed behind the gates, a cottage door opened and Árpád's wife came out ringing a bell. "Dinner ready," she cried.

Father turned to the silent herders. "How did my youngsters behave?"

The herders grinned sheepishly. "Behave, Mister Nagy? Behave? Why, the two of them turned the worst stampede we ever saw and brought the herd in, before we knew what happened."

"What?" cried Árpád and Father together.

"I didn't scream, Uncle Márton, did I, Jancsi?" cried Kate.

"She didn't, Father. A flock of partridges started them off. But can she ride! She rides 'most as good as you!"

"That's saying a lot, Sonny," smiled old Árpád. "Your father is the best horseman in seven counties. But tell us all about it while we eat."



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They dismounted and walked to the cotage. In the doorway Árpád took off his hat. "Welcome to my house and table," he said.

"Welcome, and thank the Lord you are all here," cried his wife. "When I saw this girl child ahead of the horses, I thought we'd be picking her up in little pieces instead of sitting down to dinner! My, my, what is this world coming to! When I was her age, and a stout husky girl I was, I had to sit by the window and sew all day, and here she is, no bigger than a flea, racing with the best of you. Oh, oh, forgive my chatter, sit down and eat hearty, you must be starved!"

"Womenfolks talk more than magpies—sit down and welcome," said Árpád.

He said a prayer and a huge pot of steaming stew was set on the table.

"Now, let's hear the story," said Father when everybody was served. Jancsi laughed. "The story of a flea on horseback. She has a new name, Father. We can't call her screaming monkey any more!"

Little by little the story was pieced together. "But how did you know what to do, Kate?" asked Father.

"There was nothing else to do," she said calmly. "I remembered what Jancsi said about taking the lead if they stampeded. I didn't have to take it—they chased me!" She grinned, "Then we came to the horseyards——"

"Corrals, Kate," interrupted Jancsi.

"Corrals, then. Anyway, I saw you pull Bársony to



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one side. (b I did the same thing. It) was easy!"

Old Árpád shook his head. "A guardian angel watched over you, child. You were in great danger."

"Maybe—maybe it was my mother," whispered Kate with sudden tears in her eyes.

There was a long silence. Father spoke then in a husky voice: "I shouldn't have let you go, Kate, but now that everything is over, I am very proud of both of you." He turned to the herders: "Ready, boys? Get your ropes. I want twenty horses, two-year-olds, the best we have."

Selecting the best of the big herd was no child's play. Jancsi and Kate watched them as they lassoed horse after horse. Their ropes swung and looped around the singled-out animals with uncanny precision. Not once did they miss the horse they wanted. It was almost dark when twenty sleek, silky horses stood haltered in the stable. Father looked them over once more.

"Faultless beasts," he said. "You are the master horse-herder, old Árpád. May you live long!"

12

THE GRAND PRIZE

By COVELLE NEWCOMB



T

HE COUNTRY FOLK were crowding the *alameda* in Paredon, chattering and laughing, their fiesta dress flashing brilliant colors: pink against fuschia, kumquat on purple, lizard green over flame—colors as mixed and vivid as the feathers trailing from the tails of wild macaws. As Flint cantered toward the plaza, where a canvas show-tent filled a circle of space, he could see Indian and Mexican peasants coming from every street, from every wooden door of the flat-roofed houses, and over all the village whined the music of a red-and-gold calliope, gay yet plaintive tunes wheezing from its steam whistles while a plump *músico* labored at the keys.

It was wonderful, exciting. Flint wished he could stay and go inside the tent where he knew acrobats and fire-eaters and jugglers in spangled costumes were performing. He wanted to buy one of the bright purple tickets he saw the Indians buying, and sit with the



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crowds on a wooden plank that faced the sawdust ring. But should he take the time? He drew rein under a cottonwood tree to think it over. He looked at the sun. If he left Paredon at once, he could make another town before sunset; every mile brought him nearer home. If he stayed, he would have to wait until morning. Was the tent-show worth it? He was about decided to go when a thud of hoofbeats made him look around.

What he saw snatched his breath away. He tightened the reins, knowing the heat of Cimarron's racing blood.

The whole pueblo seemed to be milling in the streets, cheering the procession of charros who were riding single file toward the bullring.

Cimarron pawed the ground, his muscles twitching as he strained to break free and race. "Hold on, Boy, nothing doing." Flint patted him, while his eyes followed the parade of hardy, dashing horsemen, each in a pumpkin-yellow leather charro suit, red sash, silver-spurred boots, and felt sombrero studded with silver dollars.

"Viva Salazar! Viva! Viva!" The people sent up ear-splitting shouts as the last of the twenty riders cantered into the center of the village. Once or twice the charro idol raised his sombrero and bowed a thank-you.

At first Flint was speechless, gaping in wonder at the sight, then he, too, waved his hat and began to cheer. Salazar was a rider! The best of the twenty. He





Salazar was a rider!

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sat his horse with the ease of a bird swinging on a perch, his slight supple body in perfect rhythm with the movement of his mount. Flint blinked as the charro came closer. "Hey, Boy, look at that! Is that a snazzy outfit!" Holding his quivering horse, Flint stared at the bright-yellow costume, the gold-spangled sombrero with braided gold cords, and a startling tiger-striped sarape slung jauntily over one shoulder. His mount was a glossy roan stallion with reddish-brown coat the color of sumac.

"This is the real thing! Hey, Boy, know what it means? Rodeo! Stunt riding, roping, bucking contests—maybe the *chivo colgado*!" Flint watched the yellow back of Salazar grow less and less distinct until it looked like a mere spot of gold melting in the strong sunlight. "Come on, Boy, we're going to the comandante."

A spin around the plaza and they came to the police station. Dismounting, Flint rushed inside. "Is the comandante here?" he asked a guard, removing his sombrero.

"Sí—this way."

The comandante looked up in surprise. "Yes?"

"Señor Comandante, I'm Flint Ryder. I've just come from Villa Juarez—" He spoke breathlessly and hurriedly.

"Oh, yes, you are the huerito! I received word to watch for you." He smiled and pointed to a chair. "I am also on the lookout for some 'friends' of yours. One of them limps, verdad? You're just in time for



The Grand Prize

the rodeo. "I'm one of the judges. Would you like to come?"

Flint twirled his hat in his hands.

"I sure would. I just saw the charros ride by. May anyone enter the contests?"

"Any skilled horseman."

"Are they having the hanging goat?"

"Chivo colgado? Surely!"

"Could I try for it?"

The chief smiled. "You could, but you'll be competing with the best horsemen in Northern Mexico."

"I might stand a chance."

"You need skill and a horse that can jump."

Flint thought it over. "I'd like to try," he said firmly.

"You'll have to enter the bucking contest first. The winners in bucking will contest for the chivo. No others."

"I can handle broncos."

"Muy bien, I'll enter your name. The rodeo starts at two o'clock. I'll see you after the grand finale. May you win the grand prize."

"Gracias, señor." Flint slapped on his worn sombrero and dashed out of the building. He swung into his saddle and lightly gave Cimarron his heel. "Fly, Boy. We're in the rodeo! Whoopee!"

As soon as they reached the bullring, Flint tied Cimarron to one of the posts where the charros tied their horses, and got him feed and water. Then he brought water for himself and splashed it over his

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grimy face and hands. Looking down at his rumpled khaki trousers, he gave them a few whacks with his hand that made the dust fly. "Gee whiz, I'm dirty." He looked up at Cimarron and smiled. "Shucks, who cares? Maybe we'll win the chivo colgado! Right, Boy? I'll come for you in time." Flint left Cimarron and walked to the arena gate.

When he first came to the place where the gaudily dressed charros were gathered, none of them paid him any attention. Then, to his surprise, the hero, Salazar, left the group and strolled toward him; he was chewing on a toothpick.

Looking down his nose at Flint's dusty clothes, he smiled, showing a row of even white teeth that flashed beneath an arch of black mustache. "I am Salazar. Take this *recuerdo*, sí? It will make you feel like fiesta—give you bravado!" He whipped a blaze of red silk from a pocket and forced it on Flint.

"No, thanks, I might lose it."

"It is yours—souvenir of Salazar!" he explained with a bow.

For a moment they looked at each other, then Flint shook the kerchief loose from its folds. The center was a hand-painted Mexican eagle; the border, vivid green cacti. "This sure is a handkerchief! You really want me to keep it?"

Again Salazar bowed. "I give it to you—con mucho gusto."

Even as he thanked the charro again, Flint's eyes were on the flashy handkerchief. He held it up against



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the light, then carefully tied it about his neck. "Feels swell, thanks again."

Salazar spat out the last of his toothpick and tightened the chin straps on his peso-studded hat. "Well, muchacho, we start soon. If you want to see me ride, tell that boy in the pink shirt Salazar sent you. He will find you a good seat."

Flint looked sheepish. He said nothing.

"Andale—catch him before he goes to the other side of the ring."

"Thanks, señor, but I don't want a seat. I'm in the contests—bucking and chivo colgado."

"You—?" The charro idol laughed and stared rudely at Flint's worn clothes. "You are my competitor? Ha! Ha! Only the charro suit is lacking, and the caballo!"

"Anyone can try," said Flint, turning his attention on the arena. The sun side, *el sol*, was packed with the common folk, their brown faces beaming under a variety of rebpos and sombreros. The shade side, *la sombra*, was crowded with the upper class, gaily arrayed in silks and lace and jewels. The flag-festooned grandstand stood in the center of la sombra, bright with garlands and colored bunting. Over the chair the mayor would occupy fluttered the Mexican standard—a brown eagle perched on a nopal cactus, a green serpent caught in its beak.

At two o'clock the buglers blew three blasts. Every head looked up, every voice was stilled. The *mayordomo*, resplendent in black silk and gold and riding a

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jet-black stallion, ushered in the grandstand señores, the mayor, civic officials, their staffs, families and friends, and the judges. Tension held the ring until the officials were seated. Like a roll of thunder, the *Himno Nacional Mexicano* broke from the band and waves of song rose and fell as the people sang the national hymn—"Mexicanos, al grito de guerra—Mexicans, at the cry of war."

"I guess this is it!" Flint ran for Cimarron, jumped into the saddle and placed himself at the end of the line of twenty charros.

With the closing of the anthem, the buglers raised their bugles and blew the signal for the rodeo to begin. The gates were flung open and the mayordomo on his curveting black horse led, in the second procession: rich rancheros in fine suits, riding horses with lavishly tooled saddles and bridles; blue-bloods from the ancient haciendas, and, last of all, the brilliant parade of charros, their silver-trimmed saddles winking in the sun.

Flint squared his shoulders, made sure that Salazar's red handkerchief showed to advantage, and followed at the tag end, erect and proud in his floppy, shot-up sombrero and grimy clothes. He sat his shabby wooden saddle as though it were silver, and waited—waited for all eyes to turn on Cimarron. They did. As Flint approached the grandstand, he came to a moment's halt. Cimarron tossed his creamy mane and arched his beautiful tail. The sun shining in the roof of hot blue sky fired his coat to molten gold.



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"Qué caballo! Qué caballo!" A clamor of admiration rose from la sombra and was quickly drowned out by el sol. In good Mexican fashion, Flint saluted the officials by removing his sombrero and holding it to his heart. "On, Boy, on!" he said softly, and followed the moving parade.

After completely circling the arena, only those taking part in the stunt riding and roping remained; the others galloped out through the gate.

Flint rode Cimarron back to his hitching post, and went back to the ring to watch.

"Lopez, Flores, Gonzalez, Diaz, Salazar . . ." The mayordomo called the contestants' names through a megaphone. As soon as he had come to the end of the list, whooping charros rushed into the arena on their galloping mounts.

His eyes flashing with excitement, Flint especially watched Salazar. The charro's skill was magnificent, breathtaking. He dismounted and remounted at full gallop; hung by a hoot toe from the stirrup and snatched a scarf from the ground with his teeth. El sol spectators rose from the planks to see him; la sombra people strained their necks; the señoritas stopped fanning their pretty faces to watch Salazar swing under the belly of his racing horse and catch up a live rooster buried neck-deep in the sand.

Flint gasped. Salazar's skill left him hot and cold at once. His pulses leapt like jumping beans.

"Bravo! Viva Salazar!" A din of cheering burst from the arena; wildly stamping feet thumped on the

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boards. "*Mas, mas*—more, more!"

- Flint was struck dumb at the ease and poise with which the charro performed his stunts. Finally, to a roll of drums, Salazar stood in the saddle and charged through a looping *reata* rope like a circus tiger springing through a hoop of fire.

Following this, a throng of yodelling charros and desert vaqueros ran into the ring, to try their skill at rope throwing. Reatas were soon spinning in every direction. Faster than eye could see, the cowboys lassoed the hind feet of galloping horses; made perfect figure eights; jerked lighted cigarettes from the lips of riding charros; roped pistols out of holsters. To have lassoed a hummingbird's throat would have been as simple for them as catching a charro's waist in a noose.

The red kerchief around Flint's neck was damp with perspiration. He began to feel stagefright. Could he match these desert cowboys? The chivo colgado was a trick that required perfect timing between mount and rider. Salazar had it; the others, too. Cim hadn't a trick to his credit. He had never jumped a barrier.

At the sound of the bugles to announce the start of the bucking contest, Flint pulled himself together. Salazar no longer mattered. Fear of competing with the people's favorite vanished.

Tantara! Tantara! Tantara!

On the last bugle note, the first of the competitors began a fierce tussle with an untamed bronco. Flint



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and the other contestants stood near the gate, watching. The black horse shot through the air like smoke. It pitched, whirled, pitched; violently threw the rider.

Another tried. The tan streak of horse pitched him immediately.

A third, a fourth, a fifth. All fell.

"Salazar!" shrieked the mob. "Bring Salazar! Where is Salazar?"

Salazar casually swept off his sombrero and bowed to the señores in the bedraped center box.

"Viva Salazar!"

He mounted a half-wild mustang. It lifted him, brought him down with a terrible drop; reared, whirled; a tornado of a horse! In three minutes Salazar had him tired out.

Bugles blew. The cheers were deafening.

Two more charros took turns, each exhausting his pitching *mesteño*.

"I'm next!" Flint looked curiously at the shaggy reddish mustang that awaited him.

"Santa Madre! They're giving you El Diablo," said Salazar. "He's the meanest mustang in Mexico. No one can break him. He has crippled the best charros. Are you afraid?"

"Afraid?" The word was an insult. "Heck, no! I've been on wilder outlaws than El Diablo."

"Mire niño, why don't you ask for another bronco? El Tigre isn't bad."

"Nothing doing. I take what I get. The Devil's



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okay with me.” He saluted Salazar. “Adiós, here I go!”

Neither el sol, or la sombra clapped when Flint appeared. There was no whooping or pounding of feet; only a few handclaps from the grandstand and a whistle or two from el sol. The Devil zigzagged like a flash of red lightning; reared, pitched, struck the ground with four stiff legs, teeth bared, mouth foaming. The onlookers were breathless. Scarcely anyone moved; only Flint, fighting to keep the saddle through a whirlwind of leaps and bucks and twisters. After a few minutes the Devil stood still, worn out. The bullring echoed and re-echoed with loud, prolonged shouts; then a burst of handclapping fell sharp and steady like a torrent of rain drumming on tin. Sombreros, coins, and flowers were tossed to Flint as he rode El Diablo around the ring. The people elected a new favorite!

“Viva Huerito! Hurrah, Blondie! Viva! V-i-v-a!”

“*Magnifico!*” cried the charros when he dismounted.

“Gracias.” Flint’s eyes glowed, then were serious again. Success was all very well, the shouting made one’s heart flutter and the flattering compliment from the charros had a sparkle worth more than a fistful of gems, but the game was not yet won. There was still the chivo colgado.

The arena was cleared and a barrier placed in the center. Over it was erected a tall frame-work like the goal posts on a polo field.



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A charro standing beside Flint watched excitedly. "Mire—~~mire~~! There goes the chivo!"

Looking up, Flint saw a bleating, wriggling kid goat hung feet-first to the crossbar at the top of the frame. From a red ribbon about its neck dangled a pack of cigarettes.

"You think you'll get it?" asked the charro.

"Quién sabe? If my horse makes the jump okay I may be able to grab the token."

"It sounds easy, but you forget the chivo. The animal twists and turns as if it had ticks."

The bugles signaled again.

Flint ran to get Cimarron. His heart drummed. "Here's your chance, Boy. You've never jumped a barrier, but don't be afraid. Don't balk. Just do as I tell you."

"Viva Huerito!" This time the crowds yelled when they saw him ride into the ring on his beautiful horse. He waved his sombrero and smiled.

"Look, Boy, see that frame? You've got to jump it. Before you slide over the top I'll try and grab the pack of cigarettes off the ribbon around the goat's neck." They were nearing the grandstand again when a beam of silver came straight into sight. Flint stared hard. "It's a silver saddle! That's the prize! Jeepers! Cim, you've got to win!"

"Chivo colgado!" roared the mayordomo through his megaphone. "Chivo colgado!"

The contestants drew for place. The mayordomo called the order of names. There were four, Flint's last.

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His hopes sank like a plummet. Longingly he stared at the silver saddle. "Not much chance with three ahead and Salazar the third."

"*Número uno*—Lopez!" called the mayordomo.

Flint sat very still, his eyes on the charro.

Lopez made the jump but missed the package.

"*Número dos*—Moneo!"

With a dash and spreading leap, the second charro's mount struck the top of the frame with its forefeet and took a bad spill. The crowds screamed as the rider went hurtling through space and dropped in a crumpled heap.

Flint paled at the sight of the injured rider being carried out of the ring. At the same time he was excitedly aware of the fact that the contest now lay between Salazar and himself.

"*Número tres*—Salazar!"

Everyone grew tense. Every head leaned forward. Salazar stopped to catch a rose tossed him by a mantilla-draped señorita. With infinite grace and assurance he raised his spangled sombrero to the beauty. The next moment he vaulted into the saddle.

Flint fixed his gaze on the striped sarape.

Salazar touched his roan with his silver spurs. It half-reared, then, in a cloud of dust, rolled across the ring at a wild pace.

The flash of yellow went high in air. Cheers, then abrupt silence.

"*Número cuatro! Número cuatro!*"

Sure that Salazar's hand had closed on the spinning



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package, Flint sat stockstill. Straining to see the end of the ribbon, he caught a flash of red—the token was still there!

“He missed it! Goat must have squirmed too much.”

“Viva Huerito! Watch El Huerito! Andale, Huerito!” The cries gave him courage.

Flint nudged Cimarron's flanks with his heels. The Quarter Horse sprang forward and raced across the ring, while Flint kept a tight rein, fighting to hold him under control. The white barrier loomed ahead. Cimarron's ears flicked forward and back. He started to swerve. “Straight, Boy!” Flint pulled his head around. The horse swept forward another few paces, then his gait broke. “Run, Boy! Jump!” Flint gripped Cimarron's sides with his knees. The horse looked at the white bars, hesitated, then drew his hocks under him. His powerful muscles knotted; he jumped. In the snap of a finger, Flint rose in his stirrups and jerked the swinging token free. Cimarron sailed over the top with a foot to spare.

“We did it, Cim! We did it! Yippee!”

An answering clamor of shouts broke loose again, adoring, victorious. An attendant hammered on an iron gong; the mayordomo bellowed through his megaphone for “Ryder” to come to the box and claim the *gran premio*.

“Run, Boy, run! Show 'em what you are!” Racing around the arena, Flint drew rein in a gale of dust.

Again the bugles blew. The mayordomo, presiding



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over the silver saddle and bridle, made a flowery speech and ceremoniously presented the gran premio. Not many minutes later Cimarron pranced out of the arena, a real Mexican saddle, broad-pommeled, and high-horned, heavy silver, chased with roses of Castile, the leaves and flowers inlaid with green and ruby stones, carried proudly on his back.

"Gee, Cim, I've got everything in the world I want, you and a silver saddle."

"Hasta la vista!"



IF YOU WHEEL PERMIT ME

By GLENN VERNAM



IT ISN'T that I'm against Mexicans," Jess Sarvin said slowly. "I just don't like greasers." He paused, looking straight at the Mexican, and then over at Tex Medford, the foreman of the Rocking T. "And that just accounts for all of 'em."

A ripple of laughter floated around the circle of Jess Sarvin's cowpunchers. Tex Medford, who hated Mexicans almost as much as Jess Sarvin himself, broke out in a loud chuckle at his boss's way of putting it. Even the Mexican seemed amused, for a smile curled around his soft lips.

"That is very good joke, señor," he said as the laughter died away. "But if you wheel permit me—" He let the thought drop and went on with another. "I share your opinion, Señor Sarvin. I don't like *some* greasers, just as I don't like *some* gringos, but mostly I take each man, one by one, ees that the way you say?



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I take each man for himself. If he ees a man, then—”

He made a gesture with his hands to complete his thought. His mild speech was persuasive, and the men became thoughtful—all except Jess and Tex, who always remained unmoved whenever anyone implied that a Mexican had any chance of being a man. Their eyes wandered over the ragged outfit of the Mexican, and over his soft boyish face.

“I haven’t hired a chili-eater for twenty years,” Jess broke the silence. “What do you think, Tex?”

“They’re all yellow,” Tex said bluntly. “That’s my experience.”

The Mexican smiled again with an air of tolerance which made Tex’s blood run hot, and then turned to Jess.

“I thank you, Señor Sarvin,” he said, “for *considering* me for the job. Now if you weel permit me to withdraw, you may get on with your work.” He looked out over the basin toward the billowing smoke. “It looks to me treemendous.”

“Yeah, that smoke’s shapin’ up like a real fire!” Tex said, ignoring the Mexican and addressing himself to Jess Sarvin. “She’s headin’ toward Squaw Canyon.”

Sarvin had been watching the fire, too, even while talking to the Mexican. It wasn’t the sort of thing you could forget, and especially when that dark bank of smoke had been drawing nearer around the flank of the mountain for twenty-four hours.

“We’ll not stop to work this stock today, boys,” he



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said. "There are still some cattle over on Partridge Mountain to be gotten out." He motioned southward across the basin. "Dad Connell can hold this stuff. We'll make our beef cut later. Right now we'd better get movin'."

"Wait a minute," Dad Connell said. "You ain't leavin' me behind."

"You stay put," Jess said. "You might be needed here if the wind shifts. The rest of us can manage this job."

"You know a dang sight better than that," Dad Connell said. "Them critters have got to be brought out pronto. Every man'll count. Anyhow, I ain't in the habit of being left behind."

"If you weel permit me—"

All eyes swung toward the speaker. The Mexican had sauntered over to Bobby Burns' cook shanty but had come back when he heard the argument.

"If you weel permit me," he said in his most liquid accent. "It is very true, the job is treemendous and every man will count. Maybe señor would allow me to watch these 'doggies.' I could do it without effort, in which case you would owe me nothing."

"Get along, greaser," Jess said sharply. "I said no once and that's final. Get yourself a bite to eat and then beat it. Dad, you stay here like I say. I ain't riskin' you out there in that fire. Come on, boys!"

The punchers reined their horses around and followed Jess down off the gravel bench. Dad Connell and the Mexican watched them until they disappeared

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into the Basin, and then turned their eyes toward the distant fire.

Squaw Canyon ran almost due west into Indian Basin. Choked with brush and pitchy jack pine, its steep walls were a perfect flue if a fire got started up its course with a tail wind. The Basin was a saucer-like depression overgrown with brush and timber. Once through the canyon, the fire would swallow it at a gulp before spreading out to run up the encircling hills. The high gravel bench where the camp stood was fairly safe, but everything to the south and east was exposed to danger.

"Jess is a dad-blamed tyrant—sometimes," Dad Connell broke the silence. "I ain't bowin' to no one yet on account of my age. A man's a man, at sixty, just the same as—" He stopped, realizing how much his own words sounded like what the Mexican had just said. "Anyhow, a fire's got no respect for anyone," he went on, "not even Jess Sarvin. There ain't nothin' like it in the whole world."

The Mexican was standing near, his eyes half closed as if the rising smoke in the distance had reminded him of a past experience.

"I know it well. Young or old, animals, trees, snakes, insects, everything!"

"Where you from, lad?" Dad Connell asked, his curiosity aroused and feeling a comradeship with the Mexican, since both of them had been left behind.

"Mexico," the Mexican said very sweetly.

Dad was exasperated. "Aw, go get your plate of



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beans," he said, and mounted his horse to look after the cattle on the bench.

Late in the afternoon, Dick Carley and Jim Kershaw, two of the punchers, hazed their collection out of a narrow coulee into the Basin. There they met Barney King crowding a similar herd.

"Better whip up," the latter yelled. "You'll get your new hair pants singed if you monkey along like that."

Dick threw up his head with a start. The breeze was blowing strongly from the west, its breath raw with smoke. Sheltered in the deep coulee for the past half hour, he hadn't noticed that the wind had changed.

"See anything of the others?" he asked, popping his rope end off the hump of a lagging cow.

"Tex and Jess are behind somewheres," Barney said. "We'd better hightail these across so we'll be free to help if they're slow."

The cattle broke into a shuffling trot as the punchers crowded them campwards. The acrid smell grew stronger and the wind felt like a blast from the desert. The crimson-lighted smoke bank now stretched nearly across the end of the Basin. A rabbit scuttled out of the brush headed east. A porcupine waddled hurriedly after him.

The men breathed a sigh of relief when they had followed the cattle up to the bench beyond the reach of the hungry flames. From their higher position the Basin presented an awesome sight. Its western end



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was a solid wall of twisting smoke clouds supported by shafts of living flame. From the edges of this rapidly advancing front, long strips of fire were racing up the north and south sides of the Basin. They resembled a pair of menacing crimson arms. Only the center of the Basin was quiet and passive.

"Is Jess come up yet?" Barney called to Dad Connell.

"Ain't seen him or Tex either," Dad Connell replied. "Where'd you leave 'em?"

Before Barney could answer, Tex Medford broke up from the Basin on to the bench, leaving a few stragglers below. The men crowded around him, bombarding him with questions.

"Jess's horse busted a leg in a badger hole just as we came off the mountain," the lanky Texan told them. "The fire didn't look so bad from where we were, so he started on foot. We figgered he'd get here as soon as I did."

"And you think he headed straight across the brush?" Dad Connell demanded.

"That's what he intended."

"Then," Barney observed grimly, "he's still in there. Being afoot in that tangle, he couldn't gauge the speed of the fire."

"If you weel permit me—"

Everyone snapped around as if stung by 'hornets. The Mexican was sliding down from his horse.

"Mind your own business," Tex said sullenly.

"I am minding my own business, Señor Tex, and



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yours, too. Would you like to see Señor Sarvin once more before he is reduced to a cinder?"

"You know where he is? Why didn't you say something?" the men asked all at once.

"I thought Señores Americanos would solve their own problems," the Mexican said. "But now I see they cannot."

He directed their eyes into the center of the Basin. Peering anxiously into the smoke pall, they all saw the dim figure of a man scrambling up a rocky ridge midway of the Basin.

"It's Jess, all right," Tex said. "He must have realized he was cut off and gone back in hopes of finding a hole in the rocks."

"Meester Tex," the Mexican said sharply, dropping his respectful attitude, "I have seen much forest fires, and it is my experience that when a man is afraid he always imagines a hole in the rocks. But it is never so."

"Great jumpin' bullfrogs!" Dad Connell broke in shrilly. "Somebody do something—anything! We can't set here arguin'."

The grim circle of men eyed each other with baffled helplessness. The pincers of fire had started closing in at the upper end of the Basin. Mocking flames danced in the treetops and chased each other through the blackened timber. And over all rose the surging roar of rushing wind and crackling fire.

It was a soft musical voice that again broke the strained silence. "I weel go for heem, Señores."

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Even as he finished speaking the Mexican sprang to the front of the chuck wagon and jerked Bobby's rifle from its scabbard. "I think it ees not too late. But we must hurry." Then without pause, he drew a bead on a long-legged steer and dropped it in its tracks.

"Hey, you crazy?" Tex yelled and started toward the Mexican.

"The skin," the Mexican interrupted, dropping the gun. "Don't talk, Meester Tex. Do as I say!"

The Mexican's passiveness was gone, lost under a wave of action. The punchers looked at each other with puzzled eyes—and found themselves following his orders.

"You, Dad, and Señor Barney, take that dough and mix it into thick paste." He pointed to Bobby Burns' big pan of sourdough bread. "Put it over legs and belly of my good caballo. I take him. You others come with me."

Grabbing a pair of butcher knives from the grub-box he raced toward the dead steer. The other riders pounded after him in a ragged file, understanding beginning to dawn on them.

The Mexican tossed one of the knives to Tex and began slitting the animal's hide from tail to throat and up the legs. Eager hands looped ropes on the front end of the skin while others were tied to the body itself. A moment later the horses bunched their muscles for a pull and, with a sudden tearing of tissues, the hide ripped free.



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Dad had grasped the idea behind the plan and proceeded to drum its meaning on the old Scotch ranch cook. By the time the skinning was finished, the legs and underparts of the Mexican's horse were coated with wet sticky dough rubbed well into the hair.

"Got him fireproofed," Dad yelled. "Even if this old biscuit-roller did kick like a steer at using his bread makin's."

"I didna; I only asked to save oot a starter for tomorra's bakin'." Bobby's scraggly whiskers bristled stiffly.

Muchos gracias, señores, that ees splendid." The Mexican's smile ignored the quarrel as he tossed the steer hide across the horse's withers and began pulling the inverted neck skin down over the ears.

But Dad Connell wasn't listening. Sousing a couple of gunny sacks in the cook's water barrel, he called sharply as the Mexican hooked a stirrup with his toe!

"Hold on, kid. It needs a tough old walrus like me."

The Mexican's lips parted in a quick smile, but he continued his swing into the saddle. One hand deftly snatched the sacks from Dad's hand to his own shoulder.

Just then Tex Medford broke out of the circle of men.

"Gimme that hoss!" he shouted up at the Mexican. "I'm goin' for Jess."

"No, Meester Tex, I go."

"Get off, I say. I'm to blame for letting Jess—"

The Mexican's smile faded abruptly.



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"It ees too late to be brave, Meester Tex. Forest fires do not wait."

With a sudden stabbing outward swing he brought his hand down in a twisting shove that sent Tex reeling backward. At the same time he raked his blunted spurs across the buckskin's ribs to send him down the slope in a shower of gravel.

"Adios, amigos!" The liquid-voiced farewell floated back on the wind.

The next moment the watchers saw him bend low over his mount's neck and pull the heavy wet hide, flesh side out, over himself and the back of the horse. For a second no one breathed, then beast and rider plunged through a thin spot in the flaming brush.

Seconds began to drag into minutes. The rushing roar of wind and flame rose more fiercely. Dad found himself wondering how any living thing could hope to escape such an inferno. What fools they had been to let the lad attempt it. A strange quirk of the wind parted the rolling smoke curtain for an instant, showing the rocky ridge standing bare and alone.

Eye met eye with the same hopeless look. That fleeting view had shown no signs of life on the ridge.

"By cracky, I can't sit here doing nothin'!" Dad reached for the reins of his horse. "Let's ride the edge of the blaze. The kid might be tryin' to get back.

"And keep close watch," Dad continued sharply. "If you see anything that looks like a burned horse, go in and pull the kid out if it boils the coffee in your insides."



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"Hey—there!" Barney yelled pointing down the slope.

The others looked around at the shout, then clawed for their stirrups. The blackened image of a horse had lurched out of the smoke wall to weave unsteadily up the slope.

Amid a shower of ashes, eager hands pulled the heat-shrunk steer hide from the horse's back and eased the two half-conscious riders to the ground. Heads swathed in what had been wet gunny sacks, boots reduced to shapeless charred leather, clothing pockmarked with singed blotches, they looked more like burned bags of meal than human beings. Under a deluge of water, brought from the barrel at Bobby's chuck wagon, the Mexican opened bloodshot eyes to look around.

"I found heem," he murmured through cracked lips.

Jess answered in person, pulling himself up on one elbow to face the Mexican. "I'll say you found me! Just in time, too. Nobody could have pulled that stunt but a hot-country man."

"Gracias, señor." The Mexican managed one of his old smiles. "But the credit ees not all mine. Without this noble caballo, I could have done nothing."

Jess Sarvin pulled himself to his feet and extended his hand to the Mexican

"I'm goin' to make it right with you, lad. Just as a starter, how'd you like to punch cows for me?"

The Mexican shook Jess's hand politely, but then



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withdrew into himself. A smile curled around his lips again.

"If you weel permit me, señor, the answer is no. I cannot work for you."

"Holy smokes!" Dad Connell said, looking around at the other men.

"But I thought—" Jess began.


"You thought many things, Señor Sarvin, but you did not theenk to give me a fair chance to show what I could do. Now, it ees too much you owe me—your life, everything. I could not work for you now, under such circumstances."

Jess gave the Mexican a long look, but seeing the openness of his face realized that he had not spoken out of rancor or malice. With a tinge of shame, Jess recognized, too, that it was now too late.

"I guess you're right, lad," he said solemnly, "but I sure wish you weren't." Jess looked around at the men's faces and then stopping at Tex, he said, "Well, Tex, guess we got to revise some pet noticns of ours."

LONE COWBOY

By WILL JAMES



I 'VE OFTEN wondered what power keeps drawing a human or animal back to the place where daylight was first blinked at. Many a time a man will go back to the country of his childhood when there's not near as much for him at that home spot as where he just left. I've seen horses leave good grassy range and cross half a state to get to a home range where feed and water was scarce and the country rocky.

That same power must of drawed me, but I was hitting for better country instead of worse when I, so natural like and without thought, drifted to where I first stood up and talked. . . After I left the ranch and crossed the river, it wasn't but a few days that I begin to notice something mighty familiar about the country. The further South I went the more familiar it got and I begin to feel mighty contented, like as if I was at home and amongst my own folks. There



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was no people and no landmarks that I recognized to let me know I was in my home grounds, nothing but the general lay of the country itself. I'd ride across coulees, crossed creeks, and rode over ridges, passes and hogbacks which made me feel as if Bopy was near and just ahead of me a ways.

I kept a watching out for the camp where I passed my first winter with Bopy, and I also scouted some for the big cow outfit where I got my little sorrel horse. But I had no luck finding any of the camps nor the outfit and I didn't meet a soul that'd ever heard of Trapper Jean. All I really could go by to know that I was in my home country was the name of a little range of mountains which I skirted.

I expect I crossed many a place that I'd crossed while I was with Bopy, and, when I finally left the mountains, I know I must of rode down many a draw and over many a bench where my dad's horses had left a hoofprint. I tried to find out just where in that country I was born, but nobody seemed to know and nobody could tell me of my dad. A few had heard of him, but the ten years that'd passed since his death didn't leave much to remember.

It was pretty late spring when one day, down country a ways, I sees a herd a skirting along swale after swale. Scattered out a bit and grazing the way they was, it looked like the whole country was moving. There was only about half a dozen men with that big herd when I first spotted it, but as I rode up on a knoll to get a better look I could see more riders on



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both sides of me drifting down from all directions and passing the main herd, each rider was bringing along more cattle and was careful not to let 'em mix with the main herd because in the new bunches that was being brought in was many calves that had to be branded. When that was done the new bunches would be thrown in the big herd too, making it still bigger.

I'd seen quite a few big herds of cattle before, but this was the biggest I'd ever seen up till that time. There must of been at least eight thousand head of cattle in the main herd alone. I wondered why they was moving so many cattle at that time of the year. Then I got to thinking that it was on account of wanting to save that part of the range so as the beef herd could be throwed onto it to mature later on. As I found out later, I'd guessed right, and the cattle I seen that day was only a good sized herd as compared to what that one outfit owned.

Further on, down country and past the big herd, I could see the remuda, and on a little flat in the creek bottom was the round-up wagon and camp of the outfit.

Leading my pack horse, I fell in with a couple of the riders that was coming in off circle and I helped 'em shove their bunch in to the cutting grounds not far from camp. While riding along with them there was hints dropped that the outfit was short har'ed. I didn't pay much attention to that because I knowed, even then, that all riders like to see many more come in and hit the foreman for a job, and get it. The more

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riders there is, the shorter the nightguard shift is cut, and the further apart comes the dayherd shift. There is two things the cowboy hates to do most, specially dayherding, too slow and monotonous.

Dayherding means 'grazing and holding a herd in daytime, a herd that's to be shipped or moved to some other part of the range. On a well-run and full-handed cow outfit the dayherd shift comes every two or three days for half a day at the time. Range cattle are not herded only, as I've just said, when a bunch is held to be shipped or moved. There's three shifts in dayherding, morning, afternoon and evening shift. The evening shift is called "cocktail." Two to four men go on them shifts at a time, all depends on the size of the herd that's being held. After the evening shift the nightguard begins, from eight o'clock till daybreak, when each rider takes a shift of from one to two hours (sometimes half the night and more). The last guard is "relieved" by the first dayherd shift.

Many riders like to take a "rep" job (representing a neighboring outfit) because with that job there's no dayherding. The reason for that is that the "rep" has to be on the cutting grounds so as to look thru every fresh herd that comes in off every day's "circle" (round-up), cut out and brand the cattle that belongs to his outfit, and throw them in the main herd.

I helped the two riders bring their bunch to the cutting grounds, and being I had a pack horse to contend with, I rode on into camp. I unpacked and unsaddled, but I didn't turn my horses loose because I figgered



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the wrangler would be bringing in the remuda for a change of horses pretty quick. It's a bad point to turn a horse loose at that time because, being the wrangler has to get *all* the loose horses in, that would only give him the extra work of getting mine, besides the unnecessary corralling of 'em.

I was just unsaddling when a rider which I figgered was the foreman rode into camp. He didn't turn his horse loose either, not till the wrangler run the remuda in the rope corral. Then he unsaddled and turned him in with the others. Then all the cowboys rode in, all but a few that was left to hold the cattle that'd been gathered that morning, also the few others that was with the main herd. There must of been at least twenty cowboys with that round-up camp.

The boys got to the chuck box and made the rounds from there to the skillets and ovens for all that was needed to make a meal. After they all was set I started in and done the same. . . I was still eating when most of the boys was thru, had caught their fresh horses and gone. The "relief" men was the first to go. They rode to take the place of the riders that was with the main herd and the others that was holding the morning's drive. There's fast riding during them reliefs because the men that's relieved still have to eat and change horses and be on the job for the afternoon's work. A "drag" is sure not thought much of in a round-up camp.

There was some mighty good men with that outfit and they was riding some mighty tough horses, tough

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as a Northern range horse can get, and I got to wondering a bit if I'd better try and get a job there after seeing how some of them ponies acted. One of the riders had told me that each rider had three bronks (unbroke horses) in his string, also a couple of spoiled horses. The rest of the string was made up of the gentler ones.

I was by the corral as the last men was catching their horses. The foreman was coiling up his rope when I walked up to him and asked.

"Are you taking on any more riders?" . . . Just like that.

He looked at me and grinned. "Why yes, Son," he says, "when I can find any. . . ."

I didn't say anything to that, then after a while he asks.

"Looking for a job?"

"Yessir," I says.

The foreman shook out two coils of his rope and made a loop.

"I don't know how I'm going to fit you up with a string of horses," he says, as he looked the remuda over, "but maybe I can rake up enough gentle ones out of the two strings that's left . . . The next rider that comes along and wants a job will have to be some powerful rider."

On many outfits I've rode for, a string was never split. Each string was made up of ten or twelve head of horses for each rider. There was unbroke horses for the short circles (rides), spoiled horses for long



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circles, good all around horses for any work, cow horses for dayherd and cutting out, and then there was the night horses. About two of each of them horses went to make up a string and ten to twenty of them strings went to make a remuda. As I said before, them strings was never split. If a rider quit or was fired the horses in his string was not used till he come back, or till another rider took his place.

On a few outfits, instead of scattering unbroke or spoiled horses amongst the cowboys, they have a couple of riders who take on and ride nothing but them worst ones. Their string is called the "rough string."

The foreman, being short of riders and having a big herd on his hands, split two strings that day and turned eight head of the gentlest over to me. What was left of the two strings could easy been called "rough" by the best of riders.

I knowed that by the fact that two of my "gentle" ones bucked me off regular and most every time I rode 'em. Two others was bronks, full grown but little fellers. They was mean to handle while on the ground but I got along all right once I got in the middle of 'em. They couldn't buck very hard. My other four horses was pretty good, if the mornings wasn't too cold or wet. One of 'em was hard to get on to.

At that outfit was where I first got initiated with rough ponies. The others I'd tried to ride before had been just for fun and that makes a big difference. I was handed gentle old horses while "wrangling" for the big outfit to the North, but now I wasn't wrang-



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ling no more, I was on circle, dayherd, nightguard and being a regular hand.

I felt mighty proud of that, but I found out right there that there was grief and sweat on the way to any ambition. My string furnished me with plenty of that. Thinking of what horse I had to ride was the cause of me eating mighty light breakfasts and other meals. The thought of what they might do to me sort of made me lose my appetite. I wasn't exactly what you'd call scared, I was just nervous, very nervous.

Then again, the boys kidding me about what this and that horse of mine did to this man and that man, sure didn't help things any, and even tho I knowed they was kidding, the laughs I'd hand back at 'em wasn't what you might call right hearty.

It might be wondered at why I took on a job that was too much for me when there was so many other jobs that I could of started in at easy. But I didn't wonder. I never wondered and I never thought of any other work than what I'd started with at the outfit. There was nothing else in the world mattered to me but what went with a horse, saddle and rope, and when I took on that job I done it unthinking, like as if there was nothing else. There was nothing else, for me.

Of course I could of rode on to some other outfit where I wouldn't have to ride horses that was so rough on me from the start. But, there again, the start would of been slower, and I might of had to take on the wrangling job too. As it was now, I was started as a regular hand, and, outside of the wrangler and the



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nighthawk, I had the gentlest horses in the outfit to start in with. Of course that outfit had a great reputation of having tough horses, but mine wasn't really tough, only too tough for me that's all. I was too new yet, and too young, and they just played with me. Any grown cowboy could of handled and rode 'em blindfolded and with both arms tied behind his back.

I stayed on with the outfit. I kept a piling on my ponies and they kept a piling me off. Finally and gradual my piling off got to happen less and less often. I was getting to know my horses. After ten years of riding I was learning how to ride, and come a time, as the boys kept a slapping my hands with a quirt so I'd leave go of the saddle horn, that I begin to straighten up in my saddle and to stay.

It wasn't long after that that most of my *nervousness* begin to leave me. I was getting so used to handling and riding my ponies in whatever they done or whichever way they jumped, that I got to fit in natural with the work, like a six-month old pair of boots. I got so I never thought ahead of time what horse I was to ride next no more and, being so used to things that way and hardened in, my appetite wasn't hindered by any thoughts of any bad horse. The boys begin to quit kidding me about them horses too, because now I was coming back at 'em with laughs that was sure enough hearty.

It took me about a month or so to get the hang of how to set my ponies when I couldn't see their heads. There was two good reasons why it took me so short

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a time. One was that I'd been amongst the cowboys and riding pretty steady from the time I could walk and riding had got to be a lot more natural to me than walking. The second reason was that them ponies wasn't very hard buckers. Then again, all around me was the best of teachers, the cowboys themselves. They didn't coach me as to how to set, but they done better, they'd laugh at me when I'd buck off and they'd pass remarks.

"You can ride him, Kid," I'd hear one holler just about the time I'd be hitting the ground . . . What used to make me sore was to have one of the boys come along and pick me up and brush the dirt off my back with a sagebrush and say something like, "You'll ride him next time sure, but you got to stick closer to your riggin'."

Sometimes, when I'd get pretty high up in my saddle, the boys would ride beside me, reach up in the air and set me back in it. "Now, set there and *ride*," they'd holler.

I finally did get to *ride*, specially when the foreman had a talk with me a week or so after I'd started with the outfit. It was during the "cocktail" shift and he was riding along as me and a few of the boys was grazing the herd towards the "bed grounds." He rode by the side of me and begin saying,

"I think you better catch your private ponies in the morning, Son, and hit back home where you belong. Your dad ought to have plenty enough riding for you, and horses you can ride, too. This string I handed you is a little too tough for a kid like you."



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That talk from the foreman layed me out pretty flat for a spell. Finally I came to enough to say, "I haven't got no dad, and no home to go to."

The foreman had figgered that I'd just got wild and run away from the home ranch. . . . Here was another time I had to tell the story of my life. I told it short and quick and there was a funny look in the foreman's eyes when I got thru. As a wind up I added on,

"And if you'll give me a little more time I'll be able to ride 'em, I think."

"But you're all skinned up now," he says.

"Sure," I comes back at him, "anybody is liable to get skinned up."

I know I won out when I seen him grin, and I sure begin to snap out of it from then on. If I ever meant to ride I started in from there and if I got throwed off I sure left marks on my saddle as to how come. .

But the foreman had got to watch me pretty close after that talk I'd had with him. Learning that I had no home sort of worried him, and I think he felt like he ought to be some sort of a guardian over me. I caught him trying to swap my best buckler off to the wrangler for a gentler one one day, and I made such a holler that the trade didn't go.

"I rode him easy the last time he bucked," I says, "and, besides, he's in *my* string."

Well, I kept on riding and also kept my string as it was first handed me, and came a time when it was hard for any of them ponies to loosen me. It wasn't



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so long after that when they couldn't loosen me at all, and then is when I got to thinking I was *some* rider.

But riding wasn't all I was learning while with that outfit, and, even tho I'd growed up with handling stock pretty well, I learned a lot more there. I wasn't playing now, and I had to be something else besides somebody setting on a horse. I had to know how to find and "shove" cattle while on circle, I had to know where to be at the cutting grounds, what to head off and how. Then I took on calf wrassling while branding was on. Of course I took only little fellers there.

A writer said one time that on account of doing nothing else but riding a cowboy's muscles are not developed, only from the waist down. I never seen a cowboy yet who looked that way, and I'm thinking that if anybody swings a rope for hours at the time, like is done during branding, or wrassles big husky calves for as long, there'll be some exercise found that takes in the whole body, and exercise of the kind where hide-bound muscles would never do, because there's something else besides strength needed in that work.

It's ticklish work at times, such as saddling or handling a mean horse while on the ground, and our horses are not as small as most people think. Few are smaller than the average polo horse, and many size up with the *hunter* of the East. *Wild* horses of that size can jerk a man around pretty well if he don't know how to handle himself. Then while that horse is



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quivering and about ready to blow up, if anybody is doubtful of the cowboy's shoulder muscles, try and slip forty pounds of our saddle on such a horse's back with one hand. The cowboy does it because he has to hold the horse's head with the other.

With the big herds that was handled on that outfit I had to keep my eyes and ears well opened if I was to do my work right. There was brands to read and tally up on. That, along with making out the earmarks, wartles and vents, was my grammar while I was riding. There was many other things, too, that had to be noticed and which, while only shifting a herd, would take quite a size book to explain.

There was my shift on nightguard where I was bawled out on for getting off my horse too close to the herd. I was bawled out for many things I done now and again but never more than once for any one thing. I always remembered.

I also remember once when I started to sing while on nightguard. I'd started sudden and on a pretty high note and come daggone near causing a good stampede. There's writers who say that cowboys sort of sing cattle to sleep and sing on nightherd only for that reason. That strikes me funny, specially when I think of how I near caused a stampede by doing just that. If a cowboy sings on nightherd it's only because he wants to, and not at all to sing any cattle to sleep. Sometimes, on real dark and spooky nights, a rider will hum or sing or whistle while going around the herd, but that's only so they'll know of his coming and won't



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scare as they might if they didn't see him till he got near.

The cattle we was handling on that outfit was pretty wild. Over half of 'em was Old Mexico longhorn and the other half was of the same breed only crossed some with Durham and White Face. Them last two breeds hadn't made much of a showing the herds as yet. Myself, I liked the old longhorn best and always will, even tho they don't bring as much *money*. And, regardless of what all's been said about the longhorn being of the past, . . . popular talk, I'm saying now that I've rode for many outfits that owned many a thousand longhorn; and I don't have to go any further back to tell of the time than 1904, only sixteen years ago.


I know where I can produce many herd of longhorn cattle, thousands of miles of wide open country, thousands of wild horses right in this time of fast airplanes and 1900 . . . And, for the past forty years, it's been handed out by *desk-hounds* that the West and the cowboy is gone. That's good small-town boosting, but, like all boosting, very far from the truth.

Well. . . Getting back to the outfit, the herds was shifted, the cattle was graded and throwed on the range they belonged. I done my little best to be of some help and, outside of wanting to "push" the cattle too hard and dragging a rope, which I got bawled out for some more, I think I made a pretty fair hand of myself. Anyway, I'd got so I could ride my horses. But "that's nothing," said the cowboys, "you've only been riding *pets*."



TROUBLE ON THE RANGE

BY LEE ROWELL

 **K**EMP lifted a boot to his stirrup but paused suddenly. Across Shadow's withers he glimpsed the silhouette of a rider on the slope to the northwest. The horseman was quirt'ing his roan for a sprint into headquarters.

Something was wrong, Kemp told himself. No Crown W rider ever forced his mount that way without good reason.

He glanced over his shoulder and saw that Barbecue was watching from the kitchen doorway. He said to the cook, "That's Kid Dudley coming in like a crazy man. I wonder what's the matter—?"

The two gazed in silence until the rider was almost upon them. They saw his roan was lathered white from a pace-killing run.

"There's trouble out there on the range," Barbecue said finally. "My bones have been actin' up, tellin' me somethin' was goin' wrong."

Kid Dudley skidded his horse to a stop before them.

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He was a handsome and tall young man, colored saddle-brown by the Texas sun, but now his tan face was strained unnaturally. His blue eyes held a hard, troubled stare. "Where's Curt . . . and Bobo?" he snapped.

"They left a while ago for the Alder Creek water-hole," Kemp said. "They'll be back by sundown. Why?"

"I've got bad news," Dudley said. "A bunch of Apaches just ran off two hundred head of our stock."

A shock of mingled anger and alarm jarred Kemp. Behind him, he heard Barbecue Jones mutter his disgust and then he noticed that Cap Pickering and Corky Dowell were shuffling over from the corral. In a minute they had Kid Dudley's story.

A war party of twenty-five Apache braves had moved across the Crown W spread following a brush with the Comanches. After raiding the Gifford herd, they started westward with the beef. Fuzzy McHugh and Hunk Wendell, the nearest line riders, were keeping the Indians under surveillance until the Crown W crew could be assembled for the chase.

"We'll be making a varmint hunt, soon as Curt and Bobo hear about this," Cap Pickering drawled. "They should know pronto."

"I'll ride for them," Kemp said, tossing his can of baking powder to the cook. "Take that to the house, will you, Barbecue? And tell Mom I'll be back with Father."

He flung himself into the saddle. Spurring Shadow



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into action, he raced around the stable and sped southward across the flat.

Crouching low upon Shadow's back, Kemp Gifford sped away from the Crown W headquarters with his grievous tidings. He kept a sharp lookout for his father and Bobo Dean, even though he hardly expected them to be returning this early from Alder Creek. He had a good hour's ride ahead of him.

Excitement, a feeling of turmoil and a desire for vengeance crowded upon him, and without realizing it, he pressed his emotions upon his straining mount with heavy boots. Shadow responded willingly, his great muscles bunching and stretching under Kemp's knees. Nostrils flaring, he drew deep breaths that worked his bulging lungs like bellows as he raced at top speed across the undulating plain.

Finally Kemp became aware of his gelding's labors. Checking the black with a light pull on the reins, he said, "There's no need for us to run our legs off, Shadow. Let's ease up a little. We'll have plenty of running to do later."

As the horse slowed to a canter, Kemp accepted the hard facts of the situation. Protection of the Crown W range and herd fell upon Curtis Gifford and his crew. There was no law and no law-enforcing agent to come to their aid; the Apaches would have defied any that existed. This was a primitive land where force met force.

Almost as though he had discussed the matter with his father, he knew what to expect. Every Crown W

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hand—line rider, bronc buster, wrangler, cook and boss—would speed after the Indians and the stolen stock. When the redskins were overtaken, there'd be a gunfight. The best fighters would win and once the outcome was decided, the incident would be closed.

When all the cowboys learned of the raid, they would share Mr. Gifford's resentment. Loyal and brave to the point of recklessness, they would welcome the battle without a thought of their own peril. And Kemp joined in that sentiment. The theft of stock was a blow at him as much as at anyone and he wanted a hand in punishing the culprits.

Would his father permit him to take part in the chase? His mother would object, naturally. But the Apaches outnumbered the Crown W crew. Kemp could fire a Winchester and a six-gun; every weapon the ranch could muster would count here. He was determined not to be denied this chance to show he was a real cowboy.

He rode for a time in troubled silence, baffled by a flood of disturbing thoughts. Only when Shadow whinnied did he become aware of two riders trotting toward him out of a grassy valley. Recognizing his father and the foreman at once, he spurred his mount, excitement boiling within him again.

"Father . . . Bobo, the Apaches raided our stock," he called. "Kid Dudley just rode into headquarters to tell us. A big bunch . . . a war party. Took two hundred head. The pesky varmint!"

As the horsemen reined in before him, Kemp saw



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anger wash their weather-reddened faces. Blunt jaws lifted grimly, "Where'd this happen?" Curt Gifford asked.

"Up on the Buffalo flats, Dudley told us," Kemp replied. "The Indians were moving west, below our northern line. They're heading for the Canadian River breaks, Cap Pickering thinks."

Mr. Gifford sat in thought for a minute, his dark eyes downcast. Bobo Dean held his sharp gray glance on Kemp as though measuring him for the job ahead.

When the rancher looked up, his unwavering gaze made plain that he had reached a decision. "Bobo," he began, "we'll ride to headquarters, get the boys together, have a bite and light out. We'll send Corky ahead to bring the line riders to the Red Butte line camp, where we'll meet and rest a couple of hours. Then before sunup, we'll cut for sign and pick up the Apache's trail. If we move fast, we should stop them short of the Canadian breaks."

"If they ever reach the river," Bobo said, "they'll find cover and we'll never blast them out. It's my hossback opinion that we've got to check them before noon tomorrow or it'll be too late."

The ranch owner nodded and touched a spur to Rex, his bay stallion. The riders moved toward headquarters at a free gait, each busy with his own thoughts. After a time, Kemp swung close to Rex. "Father," he said pleadingly, "I want to go along on this chase."

A hard glance shot across to him but before the



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forming denial, could be spoken, Kemp rushed on. "You'll need every man we've got. Ban Fletcher is on his way to Doan's store and there're only a dozen of us to twice as many Apaches, maybe more. I've got a good fast horse. No Indian pony can touch Shadow, Father. Besides, I'm a fair shot. I can take care of myself."

Mr. Gifford turned his face, not meeting his son's imploring stare. Then he said, "Your mother won't like it. She'll worry—and so will I."

"But this is important, Father. We can't let those redskins run off our stock. I'm big enough to help catch them. Don't you think it's time I'm good for something?"

Kemp's father smiled and called across to his foreman, "What do you think, Bobo? Will the youngker be any good to us on this chore?"

"Maybe," Bobo Dean said, urging his piebald mount into a gallop, "it's a good time to find out."

The sun was at the horizon when they reached headquarters. Barbecue Jones had supper waiting but before eating, Bobo dispatched Corky Dowell to the line camps to notify the six range and line riders of the planned rendezvous at Red Butte. Every man on the ranch would be needed in this chase.

Kemp accompanied his father to the ranchhouse, fearful of the moment when his mother learned of their plan. He waited in the background, content to let the others do the talking.

"We're leaving in a few minutes, Sara," Mr. Gif-



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ford said. "We don't want the redskins to get a big jump on us."

Kemp saw alarm sweep across his mother's oval face and was struck by its pale beauty despite the sudden fear. Then he noticed his sister Lisbet at her side, displaying excitement and envy more than fright.

"You mean—" Sara Lee Gifford hesitated over the thought. "You're taking Kemp with you, Curt?"

He nodded gravely. "We need a full crew for this hunt. Kemp's big enough to take care of himself."

"But it's dangerous—"

"Yes, it is. I don't like it any more than you do, Sara, but we can't afford to lose two hundred head of longhorns. It may take a few days. Don't worry about us."

Mrs. Gifford moved close to her son and touched his arm. "Be careful, Kemp, won't you?"

"Of course, Mother. Father and I will be all right."

Feeling a quick relief over his mother's permission to ride with the crew, he ate supper hastily and then buckled on a holster heavy with cartridges and six-shooter. His father was behind him as he stepped from the ranchhouse and swung into his saddle. His budding into the role of a ranch asset filled him with a sense of importance.

Glancing toward the bunkhouse, he saw Bobo Dean, Barbecue Jones, Cap Pickering, Kid Dudley and Joke Smith, the horse wrangler, mounted and ready. All had six-guns at right thighs and Winchester rifles in saddle boots. They traveled light, only the cook



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carrying saddlebags stuffed with staples, a slab of bacon and a skillet. They would depend on the line camps, or a beef on the range, for additional food.

At a wave of Mr. Gifford's hand, the cavalcade took form. As the riders approached, the rancher said, "Kemp, you bring up the rear with Barbecue. And stick close to him. Don't get any funny ideas and act foolish and you'll be all right."

"Yes, sir," Kemp said. He didn't dare glance toward the doorway where his mother and Lisbet stood watching. He had trouble controlling a lump crowding his throat.

Bobo Dean swung in beside Mr. Gifford at the head of the column. They splashed across the North Fork and moved up the slope at a leisurely trot. There would be no hurrying until speed became necessary. They wanted their mounts as fresh as possible when the inevitable clash came.

The twilight was gone by the time they crested the elevation overlooking headquarters and the riders merged with the growing dusk. It would be midnight, Kemp knew, before they reached the Red Butte line camp on the distant limits of the Crown W range. There they would meet the other seven riders—Corky Dowell, Fuzzy McHugh, Pedro Milo, Hunk Wendell, Charlie Aagaard, Chick Hanson and Frank Coates. After a few hours' sleep in the open, they would mount again and push westward after the Apache raiders.

Although he had ridden often with one or more



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cowhands engaged in ranch chores, Kemp found this an experience with a different spirit. The customary joshing was absent. All the men were silent, almost grim, as though their thoughts were running ahead to tomorrow.

Yet despite the undercurrent of danger, Kemp was in a buoyant mood. For the first time, he was on a mission that would test his courage and skill. He must prove himself equal to the others in the face of whatever peril awaited them. The prospect sent alternating shivers of eagerness and dread through him.

After riding for an hour without saying a word, Barbecue Jones could still his tongue no longer. He was the gabbiest member of the outfit; when he couldn't talk or sing he was miserable. Nudging his mount close to Kemp, he said, "Kemp, you feelin' up to snuff? Scared a little, are you, maybe?"

"Aw, no. Why should I be?"

"I ain't feelin' so chipper. Besides, I got jack-rabbit blood in me. I spook easy. Maybe you better, too, if you see any of them redskins chasin' us and hankerin' to ventilate our hides with arrows and lead."

"I'm not fretting about that," Kemp said.

"Well, that's good."

Kemp saw through the cook's cunning. He knew Barbecue was a man utterly without fear of man or beast. He was trying to make it easier for Kemp should sudden panic cause him to wilt in the face of danger. The thought bolstered his determination to meet any test.

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The column moved steadily, increasing its pace somewhat when a half moon cast a white, metal light over the sleeping plains. Now and then a match flared ahead, a face lighted orange behind cupped hands and a thread of smoke floated across a shoulder and vanished in the darkness.

At last a yellow pinpoint flickered far ahead in the lee of a shadowy mount. Red Butte camp. As he approached it, Kemp saw seven men hunkered around the campfire and their horses picketed nearby. Corky and the line riders were waiting at the rendezvous.

Greetings were spoken briefly, bedrolls kicked open and in a few minutes snoring forms dotted the ground. Tired out by his long day, Kemp went to sleep at once.

It was still dark when the movement of men and horses awakened him. The odor of boiling coffee and frying bacon stirred a deep hunger in him and he looked toward the fire where Barbecue was busy making breakfast. Near the base of the butte stood a small pole shack that sheltered the line riders' store of food and cooking utensils. A narrow creek that had been hidden by the darkness curled around the camp ground.

Pulling on his boots, Kemp rolled up his blankets and joined the crew saddling their horses. In a few minutes they gathered about the cook, tin plates and cups in hand.

"Eat hearty, boys," Bobo Dean said. "It may be quite a spell before we get another bite."

Chewing great mouthfuls of sourdough biscuits, beans and meat, the cowhands ate without talking,



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bolting their food. Barbecue doused the fire with a pail of ~~water~~ and stowed skillet and rations in his saddlebags. Flour, bacon and dutch oven were returned to the shack.

A pencil line of light marked the eastern horizon as the riders swung into their saddles. Curt Gifford and Bobo Dean again took the lead; the others strung out in a ragged column with Kemp and Barbecue in the rear.

As the light improved, the horsemen broke into a lope. Soon they came upon a trail churned by many hoofs; no one had to be told they were pressing upon the Apaches and the stolen stock.

From his position, Kemp studied the relaxed forms ahead, riding their saddles with practiced ease. As horsemen, they looked somewhat alike—tanned, rugged, capable. But all had characteristics that made them as unlike as the four seasons.

Strong, bearded Bobo, the foreman, took his business and position seriously. An admiring puncher once said of him, "What Bobo don't know about hosses and cows ain't been figured out yet. And if you got anything to dispute him about, say it from the far side of a corral fence."

Corky Dowell, a tophand of wide experience, was the ranch bronco buster. A weather-beaten man of twenty-nine, he made hard work of ambling from bunkhouse to corral on bowed legs. "Hosses were made to ride on," he insisted. "Legs are only good to hold you in the saddle."

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Cap Pickering, at thirty-six the ranch's oldest hand, made every move of his tough body accomplish the most good. His creased, leathery face and short gray-ing beard gave him the appearance of age, but he bowed to no man. "I may be gettin' along in years but my horns ain't sawed off none," he said quietly but with conviction.

Fuzzy McHugh, only a year younger than Cap, almost matched Barbecue in talkativeness. His green-gray eyes were soft with good humor. His looks gained nothing from his habit of trimming a reddish beard until it looked like a matted hairbrush. Hence his nickname.

Pedro Milo, a swarthy, stocky Mexican, had no superior as horseman or revolver shot on the ranch. Always fussing with saddle and bridle, he polished the silver conchas on his fancy rig until the reflection "knocked a man down," as Fuzzy said admiringly. Pedro also sang gay Spanish songs.

The other riders—Hunk Wendell, Charlie Aagaard, Chick Hanson, Frank Coates, Hoke Smith, the wrangler, and Kid Dudley—were also of individual stamp. Hunk carried his hundred and ninety pounds with a trace of paunchiness. Beside him, the others appeared willowy but in strength and endurance they matched the most tireless rider.

Kid Dudley, young and dangerously handsome, was the outfit's mystery man. He had come to the Crown W two months before from Fort Griffin, where it was hinted that he had taken part in a shooting scrape.



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He never spoke of it and the Western code prevented anyone from questioning him. That he was a handy man with a gun he had proved on a recent wolf hunt.

Such were the men who pressed on the trail of the fleeing Apaches, and Kemp Gifford took pride in his association with "the best crew on the Panhandle." He would have argued long and loud with anyone who disputed him.

The sun came up, brilliant and warm, and soon the horses kicked up a stinging dust that coated the riders with a gray film. By noon they observed the broad stretches of plain giving way to arroyos and draws—the breaks of the broad Canadian River. "What a handy place for redskins and cattle to hide in," Kemp thought.

A mile or so ahead, a fringe of trees marked the stream's meanderings. The horsemen pushed on, giving no thought to food or rest.

"The trail's so fresh I can smell it," Barbecue said, breaking a tense silence. "We'll be doin' some powder burnin' before long, Kemp, or I miss my guess."

"We've got to close in before they reach the river," Kemp said. "Otherwise —"

As he spoke, he noticed that his father and Bobo Dean had stepped up their pace, leading the column around a draw that crossed their path.

Held by a growing excitement, Kemp scanned the broken terrain ahead for signs of the Apaches. Suddenly hoofbeats, at his left and behind, startled him. He shot a glance over his shoulder.

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Indians! A dozen paint-smeared, half-naked Apaches. From the shelter of an arroyo, they raced out after the unsuspecting cowboys.

Almost choking on a lump of fright, Kemp swallowed desperately to find his voice. Finally he cried, "They're behind us! The Apaches, . . . look out!"

Two lengths ahead of him, Barbecue was also shouting the warning. Kemp then heard his father's command. "Head for the breaks, boys. Head for the river. Hurry . . . Hurry! Get moving."

Under the cowboys' spurs, their horses leaped to a gallop, speeding for the river bottoms a mile distant.

Shriveling himself on Shadow's back, Kemp began the breakneck race. Far ahead, Bobo's strained voice startled him and he looked up quickly. A new surprise unfolded.

Streaking from a ravine at the right, a second band of Apaches, larger than the first, angled across the cowboys' path. Whipping their ponies, the Indians were tearing to cut off their escape to the river. If they succeeded, they would trap the white men between their onrushing forces.

The cold grip of fear clamped itself upon Kemp. He was at the very end of the galloping line of horsemen. His life depended on his coolness—and the speed of Shadow. Grabbing for his six-gun, he drew it from the holster.

Up ahead, a rifle shot sounded. A second later came another. His father and Bobo had opened on the



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Apaches. He saw a brave return the fire. Others shot arrows at the speeding cowboys.

Quick relief flashed over Kemp. Although the tribesmen outnumbered the whites, only a few had firearms. Most of them carried spears and arrows. Yet their missiles passed about the pursued riders like angry wasps. One darted past Kemp's head and he flattened himself over Shadow's bobbing neck.

Rushing up on a fast pinto, a brave leveled a rifle at Corky Dowell who had swung out of the column to drive back an advancing warrior. Kemp jerked his six-shooter in the Apache's direction and fired. The brave's right arm twitched. His Winchester flew aside and fell to the ground.

"That's shootin', Kemp," Barbecue called over his shoulder. "Next time, try to pop 'em in the gizzard."

The running fight became a tumult of gunshots, thudding hoofs, hissing arrows and angry shouts. A feathered shaft struck Hunk Wendell in the arm and he reached back to pull it from the flesh. At one side, two Indians and their horses went down in balloons of dust as the cowboys' fire began to take effect.

The attacked crew was still strung out in a ragged line. Curt Gifford and Bobo Dean, in the fore, prevented the swift-riding redmen from crossing their path. The Apaches held to the columns' flanks, darting forward for quick shots, drawing back to escape the return fire.

Glancing ahead, Kemp looked anxiously for the trees that marked the river breaks. They were a

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quarter of a mile away. His spirit leaped, for in a minute or two, they would reach the protection of brush and boulders littering the Canadian River bottoms. Under him, Shadow galloped with great strides that kept him well ahead of the pursuing Indians.

Kemp watched the furious action. Ahead of him, Barbecue Jones hunched over his sorrel mount taking calm, deliberate aim at a brave harassing him. He failed to see an Apache close in from the other side.

"Watch out, Barbecue!" he shouted. "On the other——" He was too late. The Indian fired. The big man's sorrel crumpled like paper with a bullet through his neck. Slumping forward on his knees, he fell heavily on his side and rolled over, hoofs threshing the air.

The cook, arms and legs outstretched, pitched to the hard earth, clear of the dying animal. His six-gun slithered beyond his reach.

Instinctively, Kemp pulled hard on his reins. Shadow skidded on his fetlocks, coming to a stop beside the prostrate man.

"Barbecue!" Kemp yelled. "Here! Grab my hand and climb on Shadow. Hurry!"

The sound of hoofs coming up rapidly froze Kemp in an agony of fear. Although somewhat dazed, Barbecue was on his feet, reaching for Kemp's hand.

Bracing himself in the saddle, Kemp gave a hard pull as the cook leaped. He landed on Shadow's rump. Instantly, the gelding sprinted off with his double burden.





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The cook pitched clear of the dying animal.

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"Gimme your gun," Barbecue called, pulling himself close to the young horseman. Grabbing it from Kemp's fist, he turned and fired into the face of a pursuing redman who held a spear ready to strike.

Kemp heard a sharp cry of pain and a thud.

"There's one skull-cracker who's lost interest in this ruckus," Barbecue said grimly.

Arrows whizzed past their heads. Rifles continued to bark. The rumble of hoofs muffled howls and shouts of battle.

Suddenly a gaping draw opened in front of Kemp and an instant later Shadow leaped over the lip. Settling back on his haunches, the horse slid down the steep slope. Barbecue tumbled off, rolling along with an avalanche of rocks and gravel that poured down the bank. A concealing cloud of dust filled the air.

As soon as Shadow reached the bottom of the draw, Kemp jerked his Winchester from its boot, slid out of his saddle and dived behind a boulder. He saw Barbecue scramble toward a large cottonwood just as half a dozen Apaches appeared at the edge of the break above him.

Two shots from Kemp's rifle drove them back.

Gunfire rattled and boomed along the tree-studded river bottom to his right, so Kemp knew that most of the others, at least, had reached the breaks and were continuing the fight. Quickly leading Shadow to the shelter of a thicket, he flattened himself behind a fallen tree, ready to meet the Apaches' renewed attack.



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He caught sight of Barbecue, revolver in hand, creeping toward the sound of battle. The cook waved an arm and called, "Come on, Kemp. We've got to join the boys."

Kemp's heart thumped so wildly and his legs trembled so violently that he could not move. Were his father and all the others safe? None had fallen, so far as he had seen, and they should by now have reached the shelter of rough ground. But he couldn't be sure.

The surprise attack had upset his father's plans. The stolen longhorns were probably hidden in a valley or meadow well back from the river. The cowboys might hold off the redmen but as long as they were pinned down, their chances of recovering the stock were remote. And in the coming darkness, the Apaches could cross the river with their loot and be gone.

Was the pursuit of the raiders to end in failure? The fear of that made Kemp a little sick.

Barbecue was now out of sight and Kemp had recovered his composure somewhat. Glancing about warily, he climbed to his knees and scanned the narrow limits of his hiding place.

He saw the Indian then, watching him from a clump of hackberry trees across the ravine.

Instantly he swung his rifle in the redskin's direction. He ducked from sight.

Tense, hardly breathing, Kemp waited, finger on trigger.

A minute later, he sighted the coppery face again,



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this time peering from behind a little mound of earth on a flute of the draw. It was a youthful face, lacking the Apaches' warpaint.

Surprise and uncertainty tugging at him, Kemp lay watching the young Indian. A hand went up in a gesture of friendliness. The other came into view slowly, as though to indicate that he had no weapons.

Fearful that a trick was being played on him, Kemp held his rifle at ready. All the while, a viselike pressure closed on his throat.

Then the Indian called to him, the words a mixture of English and his native tongue. Kemp recognized the Comanche phrases. This was no Apache!

"Who are you?" Kemp called back. "What are you doing here?"

"Me Comanche, pale face friend," the boy said. "Me Little Wolf. Pale face helpum go free from Apache."

Kemp lowered his rifle. The Indian looked about furtively, rose to his knees and then dashed across the ravine, throwing himself down beside the white boy. Kemp saw that he was about sixteen years old.

"Apache fightum my people," he said hurriedly. "Catchum five Comanche braves. Killum four, me left. Little Wolf wantum go back my people, go back to English school in Indian Nation. Me your friend."

Convinced that the young brave was telling the truth, Kemp questioned him about the stolen long-horns.



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"Apache see cowboy come, hideum steer in valley." Little Wolf pointed to the east. "Setum trap for pale face. When fight start, me-catchum pony, ride behind warrior. Hide by river till you see me."

A savage outbreak of gunfire told Kemp the battle was far from over. The Apaches must be dispersed before the Crown W longhorns could be rescued. Only a daring maneuver would accomplish that. A bold plan came to him.

He asked Little Wolf, "Where is your pony?"

The Indian pointed to a thicket downstream.

"Will you ride with me and drive the herd to the river? We must stampede the cattle, drive them fast so they'll overrun the Apaches. We can save my people if you will help."

Eagerly, the Comanche nodded. "Come," he said, beckoning impatiently.

After Kemp had mounted Shadow, Little Wolf ran to his mount, a nervous buckskin mare, and led the way down the river until they emerged on the plain out of sight of the battleground. Riding swiftly, they circled to the east and approached a shallow valley from the far side. Kemp saw the stolen longhorns grazing on the lush grass below him. There were at least two hundred animals in the group, young and fat, some of the Crown W's best stock.

The sight thrilled him and he hesitated a moment to caution his companion against any blunder.

"Now do as I tell you, Little Wolf," he warned.

"We'll drive the cattle to the flat and then start them



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running. When I fire my rifle, you make all the noise you can so the steers will stampede. We must head them right at the Apaches. Those redskins are strung along the river breaks, so when our longhorns come tearing down on them; they'll have to move and move fast. Do you understand? We can't make a mistake."

Little Wolf assured Kemp that the plan was clear. Together they prodded the cattle up the easy slope of the valley. As soon as they reached the top, Kemp fired his Winchester and joined Little Wolf in whooping like a war-mad tribesman.

Instantly the frightened cattle broke into a head-long stampede. Horns weaving and tails threshing, they plunged recklessly toward the river. Under their pounding hoofs the earth shook.

Ahead of the rushing animals, Kemp saw an Apache pop into view, then another. Soon a score of them were running for their ponies ground-reined in the path of the cattle. As the river of beef poured down upon them, the Indians flung themselves upon their mounts and raced southward, all the fight out of them.

With much bawling and blowing, the steers tumbled down the rocky bank to the river bottom, their stampede ended. Close behind, Kemp and Little Wolf skidded their horses into the break.

Curt Gifford and Bobo Dean raised startled heads from behind a screen of rock. To the right and left, Cap Pickering, Corky Dowell and the other cowhands lifted themselves into view, still clutching rifles. For



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a minute, they gazed at the young riders in astonishment, their mouths working but no words coming.

"Well, there are the cows we came after," Kemp said with a laugh. "Every one of them."

"You can hang me for a horse thief if I ever saw the likes of this," Bobo Dean exclaimed.

Curt Gifford moved over to his son. "Kemp, how in thunderation did you ever—" He glanced at the Comanche and stiffened.

Kemp quickly explained, "We can thank Little Wolf for this, Father. He's a Comanche and was trying to escape from the Apaches. He helped me stampede the stock and chase the raiders. They were high-tailing it, the last we saw of them."

All the cowboys, but Chick Hanson and Frank Coates gathered about Kemp and Little Wolf. Barbecue said, "For a youngster, Kemp, you got pert near as much savvy as old Cap Pickerin'. And I'll ride tandem with you any time you say."

The cook's words brought a flush of pleasure to Kemp's cheeks, but his delight faded when he noticed that Hunk Wendell and Charlie Aagaard had suffered arrow wounds and that a rifle bullet had passed through Hoke Smith's thigh, luckily missing the bone. The wounded men were patching themselves with torn shirts, making no fuss over their injuries.

Anxiously, Kemp looked about for the missing riders. "Where's Chick and Frank?"

"Last I saw them," Corky Dowell said, "they were



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having it out with a couple of redskins in that patch of brush." He pointed to his right. "I'll take a look."

When Corky left, Bobo Dean sent his uninjured men to hold the longhorns from drifting through the river bottoms. Curt Gifford made a hurried survey of the flat above and found that all the Apaches had vanished with their dead and wounded. Three ponies of fallen redmen wandered aimlessly on the river approaches.

Kemp and Little Wolf helped Mr. Gifford round them up, roping one for Barbecue to replace his horse. A shout from Corky brought the rancher and his aids to his side on the gallop.

Kemp froze at the sight that confronted him. Chick Hanson and his partner, Frank Woates, were sprawled out lifeless in a little patch of brush and rocks. The torn earth testified to a bitter hand-to-hand struggle. That their foes had escaped was evident, since the slain men had been stripped of their rifles and revolvers.

For a minute, Kemp could merely stare at the dead cowhands, as chilling waves coursed through his body. At last he became aware that Corky was cursing under his breath. Curt Gifford's face was almost white with rage but he held his emotions in check, his mouth a hard set line.

"Bring up a couple of blankets, Kemp," he said, his voice stiff with anger. "And an Indian pony. We'll pack the bodies back to Red Butte and bury them there."



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A grim and silent crew prepared a belated noon meal. After killing a beef, they roasted strips of meat over a campfire, eating because of a towering hunger but finding no relish in the food. Kemp merely nibbled at his portion, too heartsick even to talk. Little Wolf remained close to his friend, his furtive glances indicating distrust of the others and his concern over what would now happen to him.

At length, Mr. Gifford raised the question with his son. "Well, Kemp," he began, "what are we going to do with the young Comanche? He was a real help to us and we mustn't forget that."

"He wants to return to his people," Kemp said, "but his tribe is a long way off—in the Indian Territory. It wouldn't be right, just to turn him loose here."

"No," Mr. Gifford said. "He might run into another bunch of Apaches, or even Osages." He fidgeted on Rex, his stallion mount, groping for a solution. "I'm sure the boy wouldn't be happy living on the ranch—"

"Why couldn't we take him to Fort Sill with us?" Kemp suggested. "Maybe from there he can—"

"That's it," Mr. Gifford said at once. "We'll turn Little Wolf over to the post commander. He'll see that an Indian agent takes him back to his village."

When Little Wolf was told of this plan, he showed his pleasure with a quick smile and a nod. Then his features assumed their stoic calm, only his alert eyes following the moves of the cowhands.

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Mr. Gifford drew Kemp aside then and said in a low voice, "I'm proud of you, son, for the way you handled yourself in our set-to with the Apaches. And the boys are, too, especially Barbecue. You showed that you can ride with the best of them."

Kemp flushed again and mumbled, "Thanks, Father. I just happened to be in the right place and . . . well, shucks, I had good help."

"You kept your head in a tight squeeze and you used it. That's what counts on the range. A steady nerve will get you a long way. You'll be a good rancher some day."

PECOS BILL

By ANNE MALCOLMSON



GRANDY COYOTE was out for his afternoon run along the bank of the Pecos River. Grandy was the honored grandfather and chief wise man of all the coyotes of Texas. As he loped along, snuffing in the sagebrush, the sharp warning smell of human struck his nose. Ordinarily that was the signal for a smart coyote to head in the opposite direction. But Grandy didn't turn away. He had heard a baby cry from the direction of the smell. He went to see what was up.

In a clump of sagebrush lay a little boy about two years old. There were no grown-up humans near-by. The child must have fallen out of a prairie schooner as it jounced up the bank. The pioneers had families so large that one child could easily be lost without being missed for several days.

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Grandy took a fancy to little Crop Ear, as he called the baby. He picked him up and trotted him home to the pack. He fed him and played with him until his foundling was as happy as any coyote cub.

As the years went on Grandy adopted Crop Ear as his own and favorite son. He taught him all the tricks of the desert and the prairie. Crop Ear learned to sit on his haunches and bay at the moon. He ran on four legs as did the other cubs. He hunted with the pack. He learned the animal language and the bird language. He could speak with any living creature, except man, in his own tongue.

In order to protect his foster child, Grandy called a council of all the animals of the plains. From each one he asked a pledge that Crop Ear would not be injured. For he knew that the boy was at a disadvantage. All but the rattlesnake and the wowser agreed.

These two were the most bitter of all man's natural enemies. They were famous for their bad dispositions. The wowser was a cross between a mountain lion and a grizzly bear and had all the meanness and ill temper of both.

Fortunately Crop Ear soon learned to stay away from them. He listened for their warnings—the rattle of the snake and the snarl of the wowser—and so grew up to be a strong young coyote-man, without mishap.

The only thing that Grandy refused to teach the boy was the fact that he was a human. No member of the tribe was allowed to tell Crop Ear the story of his



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adoption. So far as he knew, he was a coyote cub and had been born into the pack.

He might have gone through life without learning the truth if it hadn't been for a cowboy named Chuck. Chuck was riding the range when he saw a strange wild creature. It certainly looked like a man. But when it saw Chuck and his pony it slunk off into the bushes on all fours, just like a coyote. The cowpuncher tried to get a closer view. After a day of tempting it with bits of jerked beef from his lunch, he was able to pat its ugly matted hair.

He tried to talk to it in every language he could think of. He spoke in cowpuncher American, high-brow English, and *vaquero* Spanish. The creature sat on its haunches listening with interest. It seemed unable to understand. But Chuck could see that it was trying to recall something to mind. At last its face lit up with a smile. Out gushed a torrent of words such as 'Ga-ga. Ma-ma. Wa-wa.' Baby talk!

Yes, Crop Ear was talking baby talk. It was the only human speech he had known before his life with the coyotes. Naturally, when he started to speak like a human again, he started in where he had left off.

'Well, tan my hide!' exclaimed Chuck. He 'goo-gooed' back in great style. For several hours the two men stood there, gurgling and calling each other 'itsy-bitsy,' like babies in nursery school.

Then Chuck began to experiment. He branched out into kindergarten and first-grade language. Crop Ear had learned the secret of imitating from a mock-



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ingbird. He caught on quickly. By sundown he had mastered the art of speaking cultured English as well as any lecturer.

Then the real conversation began. Crop Ear told Chuck about his life with the coyotes. Chuck told him about the outside world. They talked for several days.

At noon on the fourth day, Chuck noticed that Crop Ear had a blue mark on his left arm. He looked at it carefully. It was a five-pointed star, just like the one on his own arm.

'Yippee, ti-yi!' he yelled. 'If you aren't my brother Bill, the one that fell out of the wagon on the Pecos bank! We always wondered what had become of you.'

Crop Ear asked Chuck to explain this outburst. Chuck then told him all about his family. Their mother had had trouble telling her children from the neighbors'. So she had them all tattooed with blue stars on their left arms. Whenever she saw a blue star, she knew the child was hers.

Although Bill, as he called himself now, hated to leave his dear friends the coyotes, he knew it was his duty to return to the human race. Chuck bought him an outfit of clothes and took him to his own ranch, the I.X.L.

The cow hands were amazed at their strange new mate. They were even more amazed at the things he could do. He never had to rope a cow. He talked to her politely in her own language. When the boys raced their ponies up and down the range, Bill took off his



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shoes and loped along on all fours. Even so he outran the fastest mustangs.

Soon he was elected the boss of the ranch. He took to the life as a duck takes to water. Before long he was making improvements.

Before Bill came to the I.X.L., a cowboy's life was very easy. The herds looked after themselves. Nobody cared whether or not they wandered off. All the hands had to do was to sit in the bunkhouse. They played cards and rolled cigarettes all day long. If they wanted exercise they raced their ponies. On Saturday nights they roared into the nearest village and shot it up.

Once in a long while a steer had to be roped and butchered for food. The method of roping was very poor. A cowboy laid out a loop of rope on the ground and hid behind a tree. When a steer stepped into the loop, the man pulled his end of the rope. Sometimes he had to stand all day before a steer would step in.

Bill changed all this. He invented the lasso. He practiced whirling it around his head and slinging the loop over the steers' necks. He became so clever at it he could lasso an owl out of the top of a tree while his broncho was galloping at full speed. Then he taught this trick to the I.X.L. boys.

He thought it was wasteful to allow the cattle to wander off into the hills without any mark of ownership. The star on his arm gave him an idea. He had Bean Hole, the cook, bend an iron into the shape of I.X.L. Then he heated it over the kitchen stove until it glowed like a ruby. He held it against the flank of



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a steer until the hair burned off. When the scalp healed no one could mistake his animal. He had invented branding.

His next invention was the roundup. Every spring and every fall he had the boys ride out to the range and bring in all the cattle marked with his brand. It was simpler this way to keep track of the herd.

As you can see, the cowboys had no time left for their former lazy life. Bill kept them busy. Some of them resented all the work. They grew cross and tired and complained that they had no fun any more. So Bill had to scratch his head and think up another invention. This one was the rodeo. After every roundup he held a big party. Every hand in the outfit had a chance to show off. This made them all completely happy.

A few gangs of cowpunchers refused to take Bill's new method of cowpunching. They said the life was too hard. They much preferred their old lazy habits of playing cards and being tough and shooting up the towns on Saturday nights.

The worst of these gangs was the Devil's Cavalry. It had a hideout in a canyon called Hell's Gate Gulch. Old Satan was the name of the leader. He claimed that Bill was a sissy and that no coyote could tell him what to do. In defiance he rode into the town of Dallas and shot all the glass out of the windows. Furthermore he took to stealing cattle. He roped several of Bill's prize bulls and sold them to an Indian.

This made Bill mad. He vowed to make Old Satan



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listen to reason. He knew it would be a rough trip to Hell's Gate Gulch. He didn't want his boys to be hurt, so he went alone.

It was to be more of a trip than he bargained for. He had gone not more than a day's journey when he met his old enemy Granddaddy Rattler. The big old snake was coiled in the middle of his road. It sprang at his horse. The pony lunged aside and fell, breaking his leg. Immediately Bill was on his feet and grasped the snake.

The rattler was a strong fellow. But he was not strong enough for Pecos Bill. After an hour's terrible battle, the cowman had his enemy by the throat.

'Are you going to obey me?' roared Bill.

The snake gagged and struggled for breath. 'Y-yes, sir,' he said meekly.

'That's better,' said the cowpuncher, cooling off a little. 'Now wrap yourself around my arm and come along.'

With the snake coiled around his arm, Bill loped off down the road, on all fours this time. He'd had to shoot his horse.

At the end of the second day's journey Bill heard a snarl above his head. He looked up just in time to see the King of the Wowsers leaping down on top of him from an overhanging cliff. He jumped aside, but now he had another fight on his hands. Quickly the snake unwound itself and slid to the side of the road. The fight with the wowser was even worse than the fight with the snake. But at the end, Pecos Bill



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had his enemy's promise to come along meekly. Bill saddled him and bridled him. Then when the snake had coiled itself around his arm again, he set out riding the wowser.

At last the strange party came to Hell's Gate Gulch. Old Satan and the Devil's Cavalry were having a merry time. They were sitting around their campfire roaring and bragging. They were telling all the terrible things they would do to Pecos Bill when they met him.

Bill moved up quietly behind them. With a terrible yell he stepped out. In that yell were all the animal and bird screams and roars and bellows he had learned as a cub among the coyotes. The wowser gave his own terrifying howl. The rattler shook his rattles.

The Devil's Cavalry were so frightened they couldn't move. They turned as white as a salt lick. Their knees shook so that their six-guns and cutlasses clinked like Christmas-tree ornaments in a strong wind.

Bill strode into the midst of the party. 'Who's the boss of this outfit?' he growled.

Poor Old Satan fainted on the ground. When he came to he looked up timidly and murmured, 'I was, but you be now.'

That was all there was to it. Bill lassoed the gang together and carried them back to I.X.L., where he taught them to be good, modern cowpunchers. The rattler and the wowser came along too, as pets.

One summer, Bill had trouble with the weather.



Pecos Bill

First came a drought. The range grass dried up and the cattle had nothing to eat. All the springs and rivers dried up. Bill dug a canal, hoping that this would solve his problem. It was a lovely canal, but no water flowed into it. Then Bill took his lasso and roped a ten-mile piece of the Rio Grande River. This was enough to last the ranch a day. Every morning before breakfast Bill had to rope himself another length.

As though this were not bad enough, the sky grew green. From the mountains came the wild roar of a tornado. The boys divided the cattle to keep them from stampeding. They did their best to keep them out of the hurricane's path. It wasn't any use. The tornado headed for them whichever way they went.

To save his ranch, Bill risked his own life. He swung his lasso around his head and let fly. The noose caught the tornado and Bill was yanked up, up, up into the middle of the ugly green cloud.

The thought that a human had roped it was unbearable to the cyclone. It whipped around and around, bucked up and down, tried side-kicking and sky-walking, all the tricks of a bucking steer. Bill held on for dear life. Over plains and mountains they raced. The cyclone tried to brush him off against the Rockies. It slapped him against the walls of the Grand Canyon. It bumped his head against the sky. Still Pecos Bill kept his seat.

At last, seeing that there was no other means of shaking off its rider, the tornado headed for the Pacific Ocean and tried to rain out from under him.

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Bill decided he had had enough. He picked out a pleasant spot in California and jumped. The force with which he landed dug a big hole. Today this is known as Death Valley.

One of the strange things the cyclone did was almost too much for Bill. Before he threw his lasso he put two things into his pocket, a twenty-dollar gold piece and a bowie knife. With these he knew he could get along wherever the tornado landed him. As soon as he hit the earth, he felt in his pocket. The twenty-dollar gold piece had been changed into a couple of half-dollars and a plugged nickel. The bowie knife had shrunk. It was changed into a lady's pearl-handled penknife.

